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THE JOURNAL ABOUT IDEAS AND LEARNING

2ND QUARTER 2009 Rs 50

J. KRISHNAMURTI
On Life, Learning, etc

MINDFIELDS PEOPLE
Kabir Jayatirtha
Qamar Azad Hashmi

SPECIAL NEEDS
Disabled, but Abled!

OUTDOORS
Books in Brooks

CLASSICAL DANCE
Watching with your Child



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Second Quarter 2009



WORLDLY WISE

J Krishnamurti

Society can't come about without a radical transformation of the individual.

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Kabir Jaitirtha

Director of Rajghat Besant School and Trustee of the Krishnamurti Foundation, India

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An unusual art-related peace project between USA and India

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Edmund Haokip, Dominik Huber
Cover Photo: Studio Umbilical

EDITOR'S NOTE



We are proud to reinfuse the arts in Mindfields' agenda with 'How to Look At Classical Dance'. Dancer Navtej Johar demystifies the experience of attending a classical dance recital. An esoteric, impermeable experience can become an adventure for both child and adult; as Johar makes a case for not viewing a recital, but engaging in it, coauthoring it.

Sridala Swami, writer and poet, learnt an important lesson about coauthoring experience too. It was in her school days, and it was from none other than philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti himself. He told her to always make time to look at flowers. In this issue of Mindfields, Swami brings you the essence of J Krishnamurti's approach to life and education. And an interview with Kabir Jayatirtha, director of the Rajghat School, Benaras, reveals what it takes to make a Krishnamurti school a Krishnamurti school.

Here's to many engaged journeys.

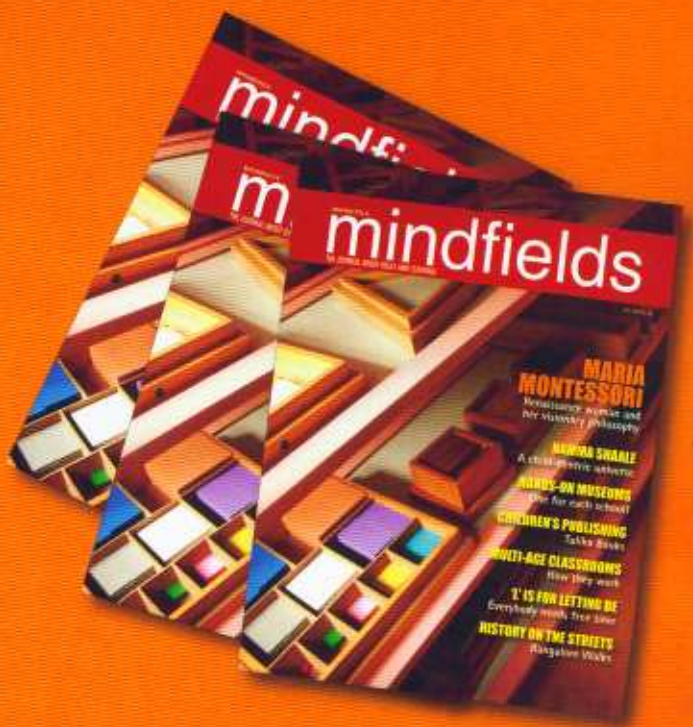
Amruta Patil

Luke Haokip

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HAVE A MINDFIELDS STORY TO SHARE?

- Do you know a person whose work in the realm of education merits celebration?
- Do you know a school that fosters individual thinking, that is unafraid of taking the less beaten path?
- Do you know a teacher whose work and spirit make for sparkling classroom interactions?
- Are you a creative individual – scientist, historian, artist, poet, musician, writer - who knows how to cut through the jargon and talk about your work to lay people?
- Do you have an anecdote about an insightful, heartwarming interaction with a student or child?

If the answer to any of these questions is 'yes' – do write to us at editor@mindfields.in

We would be happy to have your suggestions and contributions translate into interviews, features, comic strips in our future issues.

Contributors will receive a honorarium and a free yearlong subscription to Mindfields.

“Look at the flowers...now.”



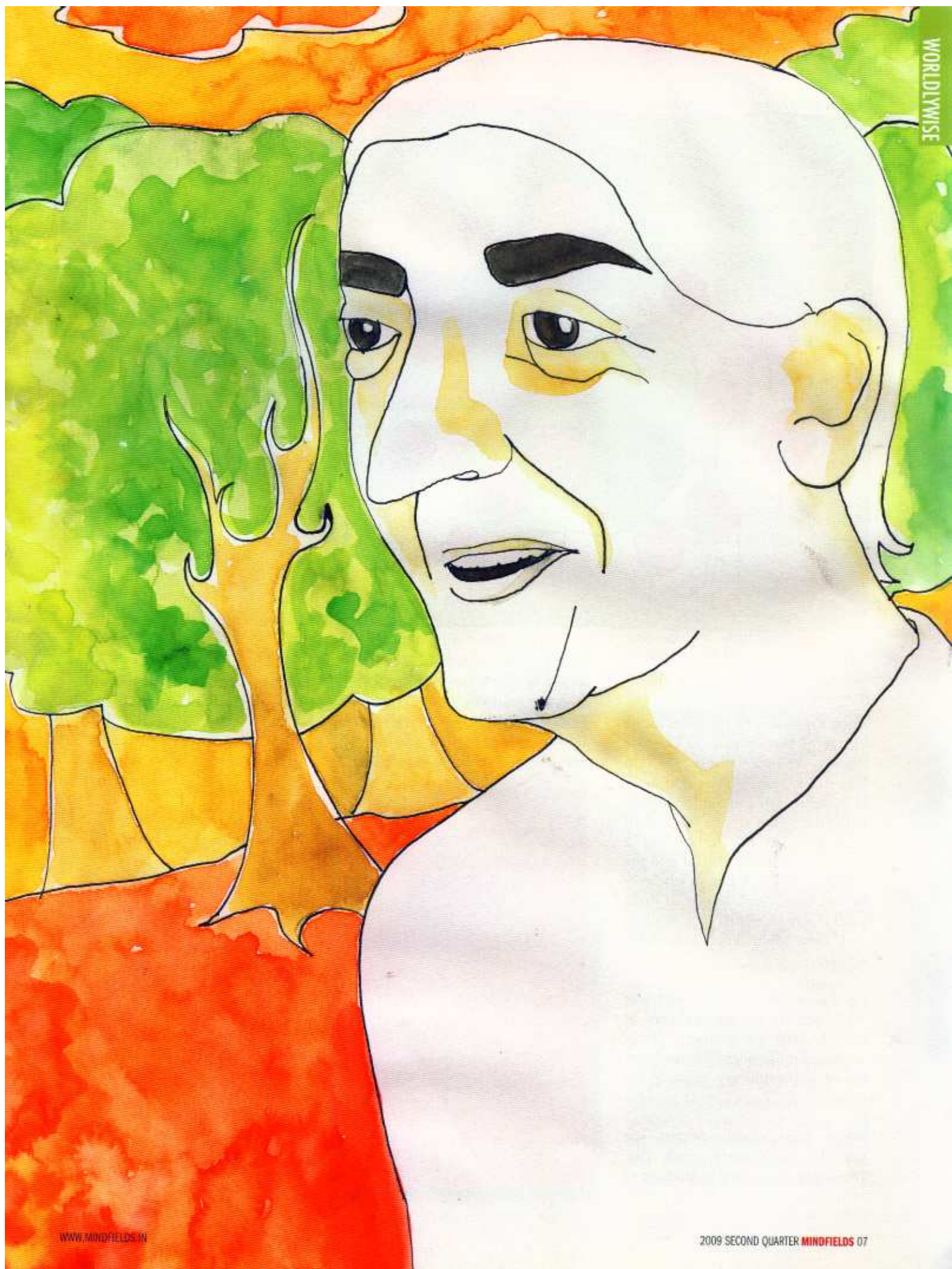
Jiddu Krishnamurti believed that radical change in society couldn't come about without a radical transformation of the individual. And that knowledge – science, math, language, skills – was easily accomplished. What was harder was to achieve a real education – marked by mutual enquiry, not authority. Aesthetics, beauty and a close relationship with nature were important aspects of education to Krishnamurti. As was the ability to ask oneself questions with no easy answers.

Text: Sridala Swami | Illustrations : Amruta Patil

“I am going to ask you something. Why are you being educated? Do you understand my question? Your parents send you to school. You attend classes, you learn mathematics, you learn geography, you learn history. Why? Have you ever asked why you want to be educated, what is the point of being educated? What is the point of your passing exams and getting degrees? Is it to get married, get a job and settle down in life as millions and millions of people do? Is that what you are going to do, is that the meaning of education? Do you understand what I am talking about? This is really a very serious question.

I think you should put these questions to yourself, not occasionally, but every day. Listen to everything, to the birds, to that cow calling. Learn about everything in yourself, because if you learn from yourself about yourself, then you will not be a second-hand human being. So you should, if I may suggest, from now on, find out how to live entirely differently and that is going to be difficult, for I am afraid most of us like to find an easy way of living. We like to repeat and follow what other people say, what other people do, because it is the easiest way to live – to conform to the old pattern or to a new pattern. What we have to find out is what it means never to conform and what it means to live without fear. This is your life and nobody is going to teach you, no book, no guru. You have to learn from yourself, not from books.”

From Krishnamurti on Education, KFI Trust, London, 1974.





THE COMING OF THE WORLD TEACHER

Jiddu Krishnamurti was born in the village of Madanapalle in Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh, on 11th May 1895, shortly after midnight, to Narayanaiah and Sanjeevamma. Being the eighth son, he was named after Krishna. His father was a minor government official and the family moved with him to wherever he was transferred. In one of these places, Krishnamurti got malaria and this often kept him from school.

He was a dreamy child and was often beaten by his teachers at school. After his mother's death, Krishnamurti frequently had visions of her and would say he could see her.

When Narayanaiah retired, he sought employment with the Theosophical Society in Madras, of

which he was a member. Dr. Annie Besant, realising how large his family was, refused several times, but he was persistent and finally was allowed to bring his children

Schools had at least one space where there was total silence. In Rishi Valley, for instance, every evening the children would climb up a hill and sit in silence for 20 minutes, watching the sun set. Only in silence could the mind begin to observe and learn.

and stay outside the premises of the Theosophical Society in Adayar.

In Adayar, Krishnamurti and his younger brother, Nitya, would often go to the beach. It was here that the Theosophist, C. W. Ledbeater noticed the boy and claimed that he was to be the next World Teacher that the Theosophists were waiting for. He took charge of the education of the boys and after a legal battle, Dr. Besant was made the boys' guardian.

They were sent to England to study. Krishnamurti tried hard to study for his entrance exams to Cambridge, but was just not able to write exams of any kind. Meanwhile, his theosophical education continued and he was known as Alcyone in their spiritual hierarchy. The Order of the Star was established, to prepare the world for the Teacher. Krishnamurti was the head of the

order.

In the 1922 he and his brother went to Ojai, California, where the first of the transformations that K (as Krishnamurti often called himself; or Krishnaji as the students called him) called 'the process' took place. He was in immense pain and often felt as if he had left his body. At this time, he also meditated for long periods of time. By the end of the decade, with Dr. Besant's increasing political involvement in the Indian freedom struggle, and the battle for power within the Theosophical Society, things had changed for Krishnamurti. His ideas on authority dismayed the Theosophists.

THE DISSOLUTION OF THE ORDER OF THE STAR

In 1929, at the annual Theosophical camp in Oommen, in Holland, J. Krishnamurti dissolved the Order of the Star. Here, in a speech that held the seed of his entire teaching, he said:

I maintain that Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect. That is my point of view, and I adhere to that absolutely and unconditionally. Truth, being limitless, unconditioned, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organised; nor should any organisation be formed to lead or coerce people along any particular path. If you first understand that, then you will see how impossible it is to organise a belief. A belief is purely an individual matter, and you cannot and must not organise it. If you do, it becomes dead, crystallised; it becomes a creed, a sect, a religion, to be imposed on others.

Since that day, except during the years of the Second World War

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nor should any
organisation be
formed to lead or
coerce people along
any particular path

when he was not allowed to talk, Krishnamurti travelled, gave talks and held dialogues with ordinary people.

ON EDUCATION

'Freedom is at the beginning, it is not something to be gained at the end.'

Krishnamurti held that only in an environment where true learning was possible would the mind flower and be free from fear. To this end, he started several schools in India, the USA and England. These schools, run by the Krishnamurti Foundations, are usually in very beautiful, natural places, with the buildings harmoniously fitting into the natural surroundings. Aesthetics, beauty and a close

The better is not the
good and all our
thought is based on
the better and the
more – better at
exams, better jobs,
better status, better
gods, noble ideas.

relationship with nature were very important aspects of education to Krishnamurti. These schools had at least one space where there was total silence. In Rishi Valley, for instance, every evening the children would climb up a hill and sit in silence for 20 minutes, watching the sun set. Only in silence could the mind begin to observe and learn.

But it wasn't just the place or the silence it held; after all one educates a person and the people who made up the school were the most important. The schools were to be a community where people lived together and were responsible for each other:

In these schools he that gives and he that receives are both responsible and so they can never indulge in this peculiar quality of separateness. The egotistic separateness is perhaps the very root of the degeneration of the wholeness of the mind with which we are deeply concerned. This does not mean that there is no personal relationship, with its affection, with its tenderness, with its encouragement and support.... We have broken up relationship so that it is to the personal, to a group, to a nation, to certain concepts and so on. ...From the little we are trying to capture the greater. The better is not the good and all our thought is based on the better and the more – better at exams, better jobs, better status, better gods, noble ideas.

*From Letters to the Schools,
15th May 1979.*

ONE SUCH SCHOOL

So these schools were to provide a space where a child could live without fear or comparison, free to explore anything beyond the curricula that were still necessary and the skills and training that ordinary schools gave children.



In addition, there were the people, the caretakers of these young minds, adults committed to Krishnamurti's vision of an education that unconditioned the mind and kept it free and alert, without preconceptions.

I studied in one such school. I was in Rishi Valley when Krishnamurti was still alive. Every year, in addition to his talks and dialogues elsewhere in the world, he was deeply involved with every school he had started. His annual travels would include visits to each school where he would talk with the students. These were in addition to the talks he held with the teachers and the letters he wrote to the school every week.

He came to Rishi Valley in December every year. As students we would gather in the auditorium, happy to skip a class or two, and arrange ourselves on the mats laid out below the raised stage. He

would arrive, escorted by his nephew, Narayan, and pause for a moment, do a namaste and get on to the stage. For every day of those three days, and the three years that I heard him speak, he would start in exactly the same way: he would look around at everyone and say, finally, "What shall we talk about today?"

His point was, that if you were distracted, forcing your mind back to something else would not take away the distraction; merely dilute the power you bring to what is considered more important.

It amazes me to recall now, that even very young children would say things like, "Pride" or "Competitiveness". Did they really want to talk about these things? Or did they imagine that's what he wanted to talk about and they had better humour the founder of the school they were studying in? Even across the distance of these years, I remember that though there was no special reverence there was also no fear. The children chattered as they do, and fell silent, also as they're capable of doing.

The first year, for at least two of the talks, no one spoke much; K (as Krishnamurti often called himself; or Krishnaji as the students called him) did. I can't remember anything of it at all, or of him or what he said or anything. The following year – the year in which many of us finally crowded on stage and made some kind of history – when he came and asked us what we wanted to talk about, I must have

WOULD THE SCHOOLS HAVE TAKEN KRISHNAMURTI?

In later years, towards the end of his life, Krishnamurti, in his urgent, intense talks to the teachers once asked them two important questions: what makes a Krishnamurti school one; and if he were a child, would they take him into these schools. This is how a teacher, Scott H. Forbes, remembers it:

"He asked us all what would be left in his schools to indicate that they were Krishnamurti schools if the name Krishnamurti was removed and if all his books, audio tapes and video tapes were gone; and if something was still there, what would sustain it. It was a question about the all important ineffable qualities, the atmospheres of the educational centres, and it was a question about what we were generating; and it was a question answered by a very uncomfortable and telling silence.

Jiddu Krishnamurti questioned the staff about all the qualities they looked for in prospective

students (as it was all the staff together who chose new students and staff members).

Krishnamurti then described himself as a boy. He said he had been vague, shy, dreamy and bad at all academics, but sensitive, full of wonder, trusting, and affectionate; and Krishnamurti asked if, according to the criteria the staff had just enunciated, they would have accepted him as a child. Again, a painful silence.

Our description of the students we were seeking for a Krishnamurti school seemed not to include the young Krishnamurti. How was this possible? It was because we as staff members were thinking too conventionally and traditionally, we were more interested in 'doing' than 'being', more interested in the measurable than the immeasurable; we were choosing what was most like us.

from a paper by Scott H. Forbes
(<http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-krish.htm>)

said something because there I was, making my way up to the stage, and invited to sit right next to him.

I'm afraid I can't remember very much of what happened. There are three photographs at home, to mark the occasion. In one, I'm looking deeply serious, head bent. K has his hand on mine, urging me to think of something. In the second, I'm looking at him, still serious. In the last one, I am grinning and K is smiling.

There was some talk about routines. At one point during the conversation, he asked me to 'look at the flowers'. I thought it was a general exhortation and continued to look at him, vowing the next time to spend time looking soulfully at flowers, creepers and the barks of trees. "Look at the flowers, old girl," he urged me again and I woke up from my reverie, realising that he meant, look NOW.

In that talk that was recorded, there was one section where he talked about classrooms and teachers. He said, as I remember from the talk, "If I was your teacher, and found you wanting to look at a lizard, I would say, 'Let us both look at the lizard' before we got back to what we were doing.' His point was, that if you were distracted, forcing your mind back to something else would not take away the distraction; merely dilute the power you bring to what is considered more important.

At this point, a classmate said, "Sir, you will make a very bad teacher!" For one second there was utter silence. Then K broke out into a laugh and everyone else joined him.

LEGACY

J. Krishnamurti died on 17th February 1986. He insisted until the end that he wanted no interpreters,

no organisations and no cults. The Krishnamurti Foundations' existence might seem like a contradiction in terms until one realises that they only make available Krishnamurti's talks in the form of books, audio tapes and videos.

The talks and dialogues themselves are not easy to read because they offer no easy solutions to any question. In fact, what they are is a series of enquiries that might prompt the reader today to begin her own questioning. ■



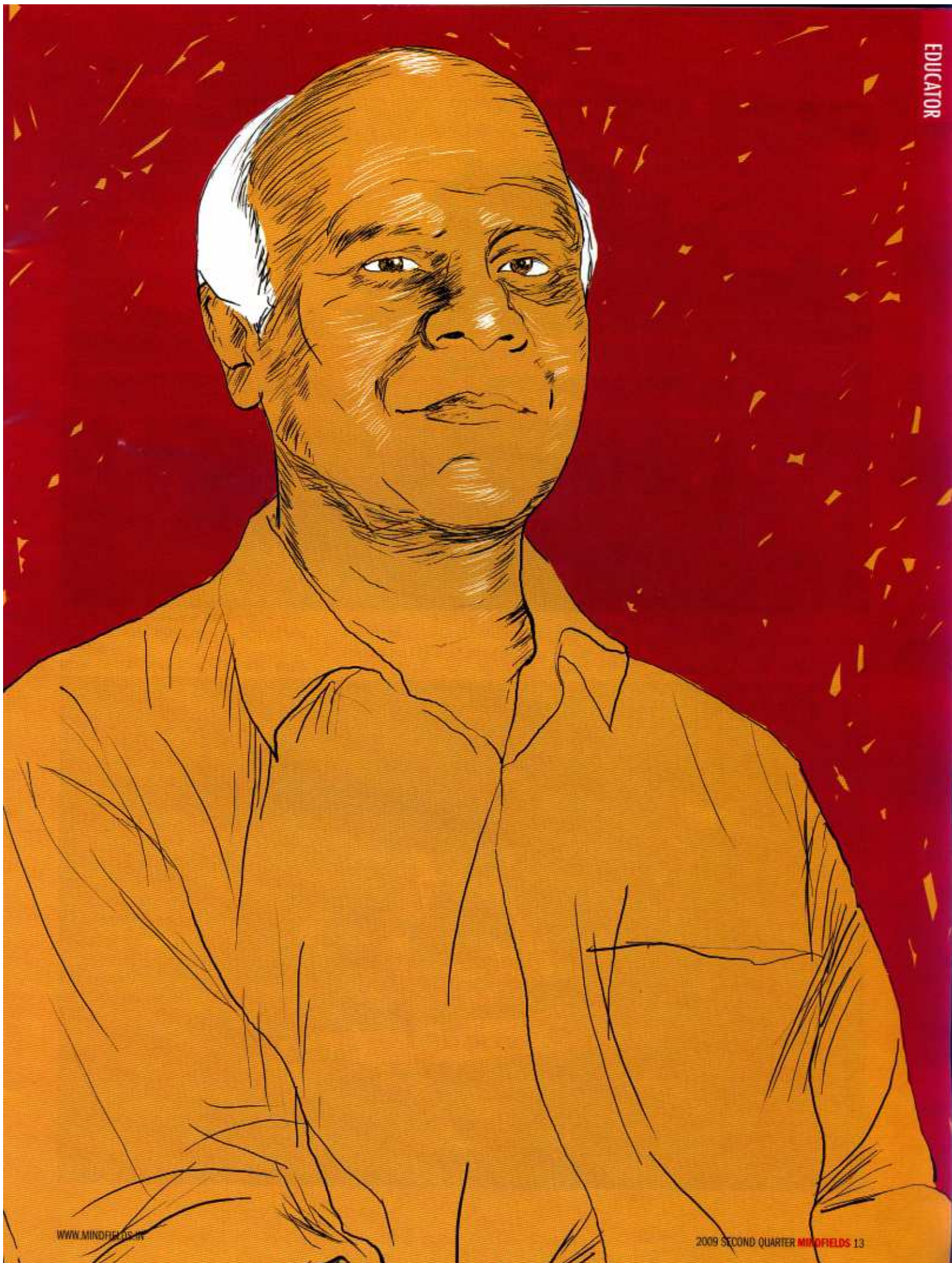
SRIDALA SWAMI was a film editor from the FTII, Pune. Now she writes poetry and fiction and brings up her son. Her first collection of poetry, *A Reluctant Survivor*, was published by The Sahitya Akademi in 2007.

Real Education is when you explore inwards

What makes their school different, says Kabir Jaitirtha (Director of Rajghat Besant School and Trustee of the Krishnamurti Foundation, India), is the simple fact that children are treated with dignity and as individuals.

Text: Shagufa Bhardwaj | Illustration: Amruta Patil | Photos: Rajghat Besant School, Varanasi

I first met Kabir Jaithirtha, Director of the Rajghat Besant School, at a Dhrupad concert in Varanasi. His wise demeanor and quiet manner embodied the character of a Krishnamurthi-inspired educator. I later visited him and his daughter at his one-room cottage set amid the peepul trees and grassy lawns of the beautiful Rajghat Besant School, on the banks of the Ganga. Over the course of my interview with him he moved from his desk chair to the floor and back as he sat and talked of his work. The austerity of his room reflected the simplicity and clarity of the thoughts he shared with me. I include here excerpts from our discussion:





Rajghat Besant School, Varanasi

TELL US ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND

I was not such a great student. I was very young when I finished Class XI, called Senior Cambridge back then. For a long time what they did at school did not make sense to me.

Besides, I was not such a student who would take up things and work on my own. But I used to read, dream and think a lot. I was a bit of a loner. I was a student of Army School, Belgaum, where there was tremendous emphasis on sports. But I would be dreaming even on the football field.

I was 15 when I went to college. A couple of years later wrote an exam for IIT and went to IIT, Bombay only to later drop out of the aeronautical engineering department. I had the disadvantage of being myopic, which meant I could not study for study for long

hours.

I finished Bachelor's in Science but my father could not quite figure out a career for me. He suggested I go in for Chartered Accountancy. But I found that boring and instead wrote an exam for the I.I.M. Before I left for Calcutta, I had discovered and started to read J. Krishnamurthi's writings.

WHEN THE SCHOOL
STARTED THERE WERE 5 OR
6 YOUNG PEOPLE WHO
WORKED AS TEACHERS
AND ADMINISTRATORS.
WE WERE ALL DEEPLY
TOUCHED AND INSPIRED
BY KRISHNAMURTHI. THERE
WAS A LOT OF SPACE TO
LEARN AND GROW.

HOW DID YOUR ASSOCIATION WITH KRISHNAMURTHI FOUNDATION BEGIN?

I read a post in the newspaper about a Krishnamurthi school opening in Bangalore. This was in 1975. The school had not started yet. They were working on the building and landscaping. I started working for the Voluntary Health Association of India in New Delhi and worked with them for three years with an understanding that I would return to Bangalore once the school opened.

I returned to Bangalore in February 1978. When the school started there were 5 or 6 young people who worked as teachers and administrators. We were all deeply touched and inspired by Krishnamurthi. There was a lot of space to learn and grow. I ended up teaching Maths, English, Geography and other subjects, as and what was required. The school

did not have a principal so we formed a committee that took most decisions together. I was at the Valley School from 1978-90. Along the way, sometime in 1982-83, I became a trustee of the Krishnamurthi Foundation.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR FIRST MEETING WITH KRISHNAMURTHI

My first meeting with J. Krishnamurthi was in Delhi, before I had joined the school. A small newspaper clipping said that Krishnamurthi was in the capital.

I was so 'on fire' and inspired by his writings, all of which I had read, that I decided to hunt him down. I traced him through common sense by looking through the phone directory for his close friends in Delhi. I was nervous to go alone so I took a friend with me to the meeting that I imagined would last not more than ten minutes.

A LOT OF WHAT PEOPLE CALL EDUCATION IS SIMPLY SHAPING THE MIND OF THE CHILD TO CONFORM TO SOCIETY; TO FIT A CHILD INTO THE ECONOMICS OF THE SOCIETY. I FIND THIS EDUCATION SUCH A DANGER TO FREEDOM AND GOODNESS

Krishnamurthi kept us for an hour or so talking to us. During that meeting and some others that followed I shivered in his company. A few years later the shivering stopped.

ABOUT YOUR CAREER AFTER THE VALLEY SCHOOL

I left the Valley School in 1990 owing to ideological differences on

key issues, like the student-teacher ratio and the need for a smaller, interactive school, as based on the founder's beliefs. The management felt that a small-school plan was not economically viable. I left the Valley School and so did some other members. We started Centre for Learning.

TELL US MORE ABOUT CENTRE FOR LEARNING

Centre for Learning (CFL) started with 10 people who each wrote to 10 friends asking for Rs. 1,000, so we had Rs. 100,000 with which to start the school.

We had 8 students, 3 of whom were children of the staff. There was clearly a hunger for such a school. Over the next three years the school's strength increased to 60. We had 60 children with 10-12 adults around them. This was the basis for a good community.

We started at a friend's place, then





moved to a rented building and then to a mango orchard. Many creative moves came to our rescue. We had Geodesic domes under mango trees and furniture was on wheels which meant that we could wheel out the library and push it back in the evening!

CFL grew from a day school to a school that experimented with boarding. Students aged five to eleven years would stay on the campus on Monday and Tuesday and be home on Wednesday, then return back on Thursday and leave again on Friday.

This way many things could be done. What really helped us at the CFL were a strong teacher body and our collective teaching experience.

At CFL our students appeared as

private candidates for the International Cambridge Baccalaureate and the curriculum was based on what students really wanted to learn. We found out what the kids liked to learn and found that the variety of subjects they wanted to learn was far more than what regular schools offer.

We also came up with the Post-School after Class XII. Post-School was started because a group of students came up and said that they needed some more time to explore and get ready for the outside world. Some of them also wanted degrees so they did degrees in economics but through distance education. One of our students liked outdoor activities and was exploring that option; he has now blossomed into a writer. Another wanted to be a designer. So the Post-School is where the students

understand themselves and speak to people they trust.

The strongest component of the Post-School is the first exploratory year, which is also a starting point for a dialogue. The students go out on treks, volunteer, work with N.G.O's. Some return back to the programme and the others move on to other things. All students seem to have benefited from the programme. We start with students' interests and then look around for resource people or organizations for them to follow.

WHAT DOES YOUR DAY LOOK LIKE HERE IN VARANASI?

My day depends on the school and the workings of the school. I start my day early and at 6.40 a.m. meet with teachers to discuss school, education and other issues. We

have assembly at 8.00 in the morning and then move on to routine school work. These days we have a 40-minute Work Period at school where groups of students volunteer to clean up different parts of the school. I am in the group that is responsible for library cleaning. The rest of the day is spent in administrative work and day to day school decisions. I teach maths and economics. At 4.30, I return back home and walk in the evenings. We sometimes have evening meetings. If not, I spend my time reading or sit quietly.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY READING?

I like reading fiction but I am selective. I have enjoyed Amitav Ghosh's writings a lot. I also read books on philosophy and history. I enjoy literature. I recently subscribed to The New York Review of Books. I also like poetry, music and architecture.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR INTEREST IN MUSIC

Music is of great importance to my life. I hesitate to sing for other people because of lack of riyaz. I like listening to Dhrupad mostly. My taste is quite different. I like Lalit Rao, Bahauddin Dagar, and Nikhil Banerjee

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS AFTER VARANASI?

After my three-year commitment is over, I would like to spend a year alone without being with anyone. I no longer see my life in terms of retirement. There is no division between my work and my life. They come together. I like to spend time with myself and see what comes out of that. I would like to explore in my own way whether the mind can become totally still.

I FIND IT MORE
INTERESTING TO WORK
WITH YOUNGER TEACHERS
THAN ADULTS. THEY ARE
MUCH MORE SENSITIVE TO
EDUCATION.

WHAT CHANGES DO YOU SEE OVER THE PAST 30 YEARS IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION?

I have not seen many changes in the education system. A lot of what people call education is simply shaping the mind of the child to conform to society; to fit a child into the economics of the society. I find this education such a danger to freedom and goodness because if the mind is shaped and conditioned, it cannot explore goodness.

The whole process of this education is to tame the energies because we feel untamed energy is disorderly. Education should really be nurturing the energy that has been untamed. I believe real education is when you explore inwards. A mature mind is a mind that is able to explore inner and outer movement.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT TEACHERS?

Sadly, people come with a lot of qualifications to teaching, but they do not have an understanding of their subjects. This shows how poor our education system is. There is not much dignity given to this profession. I find it more interesting to work with younger teachers than adults.

They are much more sensitive to education. It is a challenge to find committed teachers who are not

only committed but understand and have sensitivity to the school. Surely, we have failed ourselves somewhere or else we would have produced more teachers from our own Krishnamurthi schools.

HOW ARE THE WORDS OF KRISHNAMURTHI RELEVANT TODAY?

Krishnamurti talks of things which are of significance whether you have lived in ancient India or the modern world. He talks about relationships, about the nature of relationships and what prevents us from relating to one another. I feel these ideas have enormous significance. We are conditioned to think we are separate from one another.

One can see how this feeling of separation is imposed on us on the through identities of nation, caste or religion. This is a construct of the mind (thought). Small children do not have such identities based on ideology, group or religion. Even the sense of I and me is a conditioning of thought. Being separate and lonely becomes either attachment or deep dependence, which one is afraid to lose. So there is no freedom in this way of relating to each other. To actually relate there has to be no sense of separation in identity. Though we have lived with this separation for over 10,000 years it is worthwhile to see if this can be put to an end. This is the highest responsibility of a human being. ■



SHAGUFTA BHARDWAJ is a cultural historian, advisor and educator. Leads Sunday walks to heritage sites for the India Habitat Centre. Can generally found in the narrowest lanes leading to the oldest havelis in Delhi.

FROM THE USA TO INDIA TWO QUILTS ONE WORLD

Some issues back, Mindfields had covered the story Rikki Asher's time at the Pardada Pardadi School in Anupshahar, Uttar Pradesh. Now we bring you the second part of the story – about the unusual art-related research project that took Asher from New York City to heartland India and back.

Text and Photos: Rikki Asher

I went to India last year on a teaching sabbatical to continue an art related research project that I began in 2007. In some small, economically poor villages in India, it is typical for young girls to become child brides. The school I'm working in is challenging this tradition. Sitting in the passenger seat of a green jeep with Virendera (Sam) Singh and Mukesh, his driver, we ride over bumpy unpaved dusty roads. Sam is the founder of Pardada Pardadi Educational Society (PPES) in Anupshahar, Uttar Pradesh. His idea was to use the name Pardada



East Bronx Academy for the Future, Bronx, New York, USA



Pardada Pardadi School, Anupshahar, Uttar Pradesh

Pardadi, (great grandparent in Hindi) as a metaphor for the ancient Indian tradition of incorporating knowledge and education to foster full individuation in a human being. As we drive in the jeep he tells me about the school history.

PPES was established in 2000 by Sam, a retired U.S. Dupont South Asia director, originally from Anupshahar. After retirement, Sam returned to live in India and improve situations of girls living in this village. According to the school's website: www.education4change.org nearly half of India's population is illiterate; males outnumber females two-to-one in literacy and the drop-out rates for girls are as high

as 58% in primary and upper primary schools" (Asher, 2008, p. 54). Girls face daily gender bias and discrimination, nutritional issues, economic inequality with male family members, and add to that violence both in and outside of home.

The curriculum includes academic studies and vocational training. Vocational classes place considerable training in *Aari*, a traditional Indian embroidery style which combines stitching beads together to form both simple and complex designs; appliqué; and *Zardozi*. The girls also learn block printing, machine sewing, and quilting, they apply these skills with embroidery in the form of table cloths, bed covers, sheets,

curtains and cushion covers. Their products are sold in shops at New Delhi with the proceeds going towards the school and welfare of women in Anupshahar.

Based on a successful (featured in a previous issue of *Mindfields*) bookmaking exchange research project that took place during my previous trip to India in 2007, I was invited to return to the school in 2008 to continue with my research.

Two months before returning, I saw an exhibition of African-American artist Faith Ringgold's Peace Story Quilts based on drawn and written reactions of New York's children to 9/11. The quilts combined text and images.



Rikki Asher with students of Pardada Pardadi School



Girls on their way to school



Peace Stories Quilt by 8th graders in the Pardada Pardadi Educational Society, India



The East Bronx Academy for the Future's Bronx Days and Nights quilt

The upper border spelled out a question raised by the youth of New York City: What will YOU do for peace? (Ringgold, 2004). When I saw those quilts, my reaction was, "Here is an example of what Art can do for peace, and remembered the extraordinary sewing skills of the Indian students. It was then that I began a plan for their Peace Quilt."

When I returned to PPES, the same students expressed their delight to work with me again. S. Shanti, an administrator, translated my English into Hindi as we discussed different kinds of quilts. The girls wrote about and illustrated ideas based on their experiences of village life. For some, the project changed their view of village life, art making, and themselves.

Prior to leaving for India, I worked closely with East Bronx Academy For The Future (EBAF) art teacher, Jane Pinchuck and her 8th standard class. They designed a peace quilt that would be exchanged for a peace quilt made in the village school. The completed Bronx quilt was brought to India.

EBAF students are required to take

an art class. The girls in the village also take a required art class. In the Bronx, the adolescents were encouraged to express themselves freely. In the India, the art classes focused more on learning classical Indian and natural motifs, also on patterns with color pencils and markers on paper, copying from books, with little or no time to explore self expressive artwork. The Bronx group do not have vocational classes, whereas the Indian students take vocational courses with considerable training in the traditional art of embroidery and sewing, as mentioned earlier.

A cemented pathway and a single step lead to the entrance of the Pardada Pardadi school. Bullock carts ride slowly past the road of PPES, while green parrots fly overhead. As class began, the girls were all seated on a rug on the floor, their shoes lined up outside the classroom in neat rows, ready to begin.

EBAF is located under an elevated train on Southern Boulevard in the Bronx. Long shadows create patterns on black asphalt streets, squirrels and pigeons live nearby and vie for attention on the

sidewalks or are perched on train station ledges. Part of my enthusiasm regarding this quilt project with Jane developed out of my desire to counteract the negative publicity and harsh public images that the Bronx has as an area of devastation and hopelessness.

I visited EBAF in the Bronx to introduce the peace quilt project. I showed photographs of the Indian girls and the village to the Bronx group. A month later, in India, the girls examined the completed Bronx quilt which immediately motivated them to begin their own. Both groups were enthusiastic to communicate with the other via a quilt.

The quilts were similar in regards to the kinds of scenes the students chose to portray. The American group showed Bronx morning and evening cityscapes and activities, while the Indian girls represented morning and evening landscapes, animals and daily life in their village.

This Bronx classroom has new tables and chairs where students sit together in small groups. The art teacher has access to a lap top

computer and projector for all of her classes. Students have access to computers in another room during Computer Class. The class developed individual squares for their class quilt.

The *Bronx Days and Nights* quilt began to evolve along with laughter and excitement. Students started with thumbnail sketches from their memories of their neighborhood.

They wanted to express a feeling about the Bronx to the Indian students. They chose designs and created collages with colored papers (to scale) in order to learn about simplified shapes and colors. Through sewing and gluing pieces of felt, fabric scraps, buttons, lace, and ribbon the individual squares began to take shape. The student's talents, strengths and abilities to design, plan and construct the 20 quilt squares were used to the fullest. Some designs included: Hip hop artists; trains, a sleep over, trees, pollution, buildings, baseball, and a teenager with an iPod.

The Indian class enjoyed working in groups. Each group created a square that portrayed a story about peace in their village. Six groups designed six squares, each group compiled four ideas to make one square. This quilt was sewn with colored cotton fabric, beads, embroidery threads and seashells by hand and by machine. One design shows a dancer underneath the sun on the way to a temple. Other designs included: A smiling moon and sun, girls holding hands, a house, two swans, flowers, sugar cane, a cow, a farmer, birds and a dog.

The quilts were exchanged and both groups explored relationships among art, language, communication, and cooperative learning through the construction of the peace quilts. When I talked with the Indian girls about this project

Art experiences related to the theme of peace can provide opportunities for young people to focus on the positive segments of their world and themselves

they said, "We used to copy flowers, now we can draw from the flower and tell stories through my sewing. We hope that other people in the US will like our quilt and that they learn something about India."

Students sharpened verbal and artistic skills, perception, and memory by engaging in drawing, painting, story telling, and sewing activities.

The Bronx students' comments reflect enthusiasm, and cultural awareness.

"This project gave me a chance to be grateful for the resources we have and to think about how not everyone has the same resources."

"Village life in India is very different than life here in the Bronx. I got to see how Indian girls expressed their views. I hope they enjoy our quilt."

American students learned about issues affecting girls in rural India and the Indian group learned about American culture from students in their own age.

This visual art project changed the Indian girl's ideas of art and learning as they developed a feeling of ownership of their personal history (Asher, 2007, p. 23). Both Indian and Bronx students were

open to self-expression and imagination and moved to new levels of environmental awareness and self worth. When the New York students realized that the Indian quilt was a gift to them from the girls, they couldn't believe it. The girls in India were thrilled to receive their gift of art when I unrolled the Bronx made quilt.

Art experiences related to the theme of peace can provide opportunities for young people to focus on the positive segments of their world and themselves perhaps for the first time. My hope is that this story will provide creative strategies that engage the minds of both teachers' and students', and portray how youth from across the globe connected with the world of art. ■

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RIKKI ASHER began melting crayons on a radiator at age five. is Director of Art Education at Queens College, Aesthetic Education Consultant,

painter and printmaker, can be found standing on her head and then sitting on a cushion facing a wall for two hours, most mornings, loves animals and refuses to eat them, lives in New York City with her husband and cat.

RUNNING BY THE BROOKS

A teacher and facilitator for many years, Rachna Chawla's favourite classroom remains the outdoors. The soft scratching of grass underfoot, warm sun on skin. The movements and sounds of nature that remind you that the world outside is as alive as the world inside.

Find tongues in trees, books in running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything.

William Shakespeare (As You Like It)

Text: Rachna Chawla | Photos: Youreka (www.youreka.in)

I have been asked this question many a time – both in the context of working with children and with adults – why the outdoors? I'm not the traditional outdoorsy type, I've never really tried extreme outdoor sports, yet if I have to look for the perfect learning/teaching environment I head for the hills. For me the answer gradually emerged. It is in the outdoors that I have experienced myself and others around me really able to get in touch with our natural selves. With our feet firmly grounded and our head in the clouds, I have seen personal energy flow in ways that are hard to imagine sitting on a chair confined by four walls.

This 'natural self' is what I believe is the source of all our creativity. It is in nature that I have experienced children and adults alike discover or rediscover who they are, and often who they can be.

SWEET & SOUR

A few days ago I was driving my kids and their friend for a swim, and casually listening to their conversation on the way. This friend suggested a game called "sweet &

sour" where you wave to different people in other cars and if they smile and wave back they are sweet... you get the picture! The trick was to guess beforehand of course if the stranger in the next car would be sweet or sour. No prizes for guessing what the majority would be... aghast!

I stifled my own horrified protest as this 12 year old continued "I

Is it just a norm that has been established – strangers in the outdoors are OK, even fun! But strangers in the next car in the city you may have grown up in are potentially dangerous? Or maybe it is the fact that you may need the assistance of these strangers in the outdoors so it's better to make connections.

absolutely love this game, but my mom has absolutely forbidden me to play it" I had been about to be another forbidding mom.

Why, I wondered first to myself, and then aloud to the kids, is it OK for adults to wave madly at the village kids that we encounter during treks in the mountains – and the mothers there never seem to stop the kids waving to total strangers. Up to a couple of years ago I used to accompany a bunch of kids out for a rafting camp every summer. It is the norm to yell out and wave at every passing raft and every holiday maker on the shore, whether you know the people in or not (and in most cases you can't recognise people underneath all that gear anyway)

Is it just a norm that has been established – strangers in the outdoors are OK, even fun! But strangers in the next car in the city you may have grown up in are potentially dangerous? Or maybe it is the fact that you may need the assistance of these strangers in the outdoors so it's better to make connections. My understanding is that there is something about the





outdoors – being in touch with nature – that allows us all, adults and children – to connect with our natural selves. To just be.

NATURAL WONDERS

In The summer of 2002 we decided to take a month long trip across the USA. My husband had been a student in Boston and we had spent a year with the family split across two continents and this seemed to be the perfect way to reconnect as a family.

There are a number of stories I could tell about this trip, but there is one moment that stands out for me. We had spent a couple of weeks between buses, trains, cars and hotel rooms and had finally reached The Grand Canyon. There it was, laid out before us, one of the most wondrous sights I have seen. I could sense the kids (all of 3 and 5 then) too breathe a sigh of fresh relief and just want to stay put for a while.

We had to take it in fully, which meant look at it from all angles eat every meal and take every nap in a place where we were overlooking the grand canyon. Somehow, this

Outdoors for children is not about viewing from a distance – its about engaging with the outdoors – doing things, exploring, probing, pursuing, discovering

did not work for the kids. For them, the highlight of those 2 days was the couple of hours I spent doing laundry – they played freely during that time, exploring, building their own structures with twigs, stones and pine cones, getting part of the grand canyon on their faces and butts and they had a blast. The lesson for me in that was that the outdoors for children (and many former children too) is not about viewing from a distance – its about engaging with the outdoors – doing things, exploring, probing, pursuing, discovering the outdoors and in that process discovering themselves.

Over the last few years I have had the privilege of sharing this discovery with some very special children – my own as well as kids I have spent time with in outdoor based camps. And each moment has been a revelation. I remember particularly a teenage girl who was very upset that she was not in the same group as her gang at camp and she accosted me at every available moment – trying to find creative reasons to convince me to ‘allow’ her to go out for the activities with her friends. I don’t know if I’m the strict sort – the one who allows or does not allow – in the outdoors, I just somehow intuitively know what to do and in this case I knew too what had to be done, but no amount of reasoning worked with her either. Both of use were being as stubborn as mules, I just happened to be the mule with the power.

Three days later, when she returned from a gruelling trek (with the group that was not her gang!) she saw me, flung herself onto me and yelled in my ear “RC (important note – it is NOT cool to be called Rachna Ma’am in the outdoors) thanks for not changing my group, I had the best

time ever!" I don't know what happened – except for the fact that she had no choice but to engage with the experience – and that really is all that it takes.

A REAL DETOX

There is a culture in Mirambika, the alternative school that my kids have been going to since they were 4, to start each year with regular mud baths. Not quite California style, but every late April you will come across new parents, teachers and kids digging away in the sun to create a mud pit and then filling it with water to create a chocolaty brown slush.

The kids enter hesitantly at first, some more squeamish than others, but by the time its time for school to close for vacations you'll regularly find the new kids accompanied by teachers and a few spirited parents too frolicking in the mud and taking as much pleasure in hosing each other down afterwards!

I remember as a rookie parent tentatively asking Sulochana Didi – who ostensibly a teacher for the kids, but someone who has taught me and a number of parents some critical life lessons – 'why mud baths? I can see the fun the kids are having, but at school?'

"Its part of the un learning process", she would say, "kids come to us usually after a couple of years of pre-school, where they have been made to sit on chairs the whole day and make straight lines and curved C's rather than express who they are that we need to spend the first month helping the children reconnect with themselves – that's when they will be ready to begin learning" –and what better way to reconnect with yourself than earth, sky and water!

MOST BUGGING

One of the most important things my daughter (a veteran of 3 outdoor camps and numerous school trips –

You could hear the thoughts going through all 20 teachers in that room – "when was the last time the students in my class came in with this excitement, this curiosity, this hunger to learn?"

she is always ready to drop anything and head off to the outdoors with me – even when she knows I will be working) has learned from the outdoors according to her is, "Not to scream at bugs! There are so many of them around that if you screamed at every bug you saw, you would be screaming all the time – there are so many other interesting things to do that you don't want to waste your time screaming!"

Just yesterday I was trying to get through to my son about some homework to be done and coming up against huge and familiar resistance when Avni, who has been a silent spectator to many such conversations pipes in with an observation – "Kartik, you are always focussing on the negatives, what is wrong with things. Try seeing what's right for a change !" Hmmm, I guess the bugs lesson was more than just about bugs.

CHANGE AROUND THE CORNER

I asked my now 12 year old – what she likes best about the outdoors. "The fact that there is always something unexpected to discover", she said. "Every time I go for a walk there is something new – a tree in bloom, a spiders web, a new insect or bird that I have never seen, a new shade of purple" (a new way of relating to someone? – my contribution).

I was working with a group of

teachers a few years ago. We were 3 days into the workshop and that morning I asked the group, "what's on top of your mind this morning?". I had barely completed my question when one of the teachers jumped up to say "I have been very excited all morning, looking forward to this workshop, all I could think of was what was in store for us today, what new experiences would we have, what would I learn?"

There was a sudden silence after this response – you could hear the thoughts going through all 20 teachers in that room – "when was the last time the students in my class came in with this excitement, this curiosity, this hunger to learn?"

Lately I've been spending a lot of time with entrepreneurs and business leaders. The single most difficult challenge for them is grappling with continuous change. It is difficult for them to move out of the ways that have worked for them in the past, and engage spontaneously with the unexpected... very few welcome the unpredictable and embrace it spontaneously, they have forgotten how to engage with it and engage with themselves and engage with each other too.

The natural world can help us and our children keep in touch with this ability, for this is something that comes naturally to us all...we just forget! ■



RACHNA CHAWLA

Currently toggling between ensuring holiday homework gets completed without

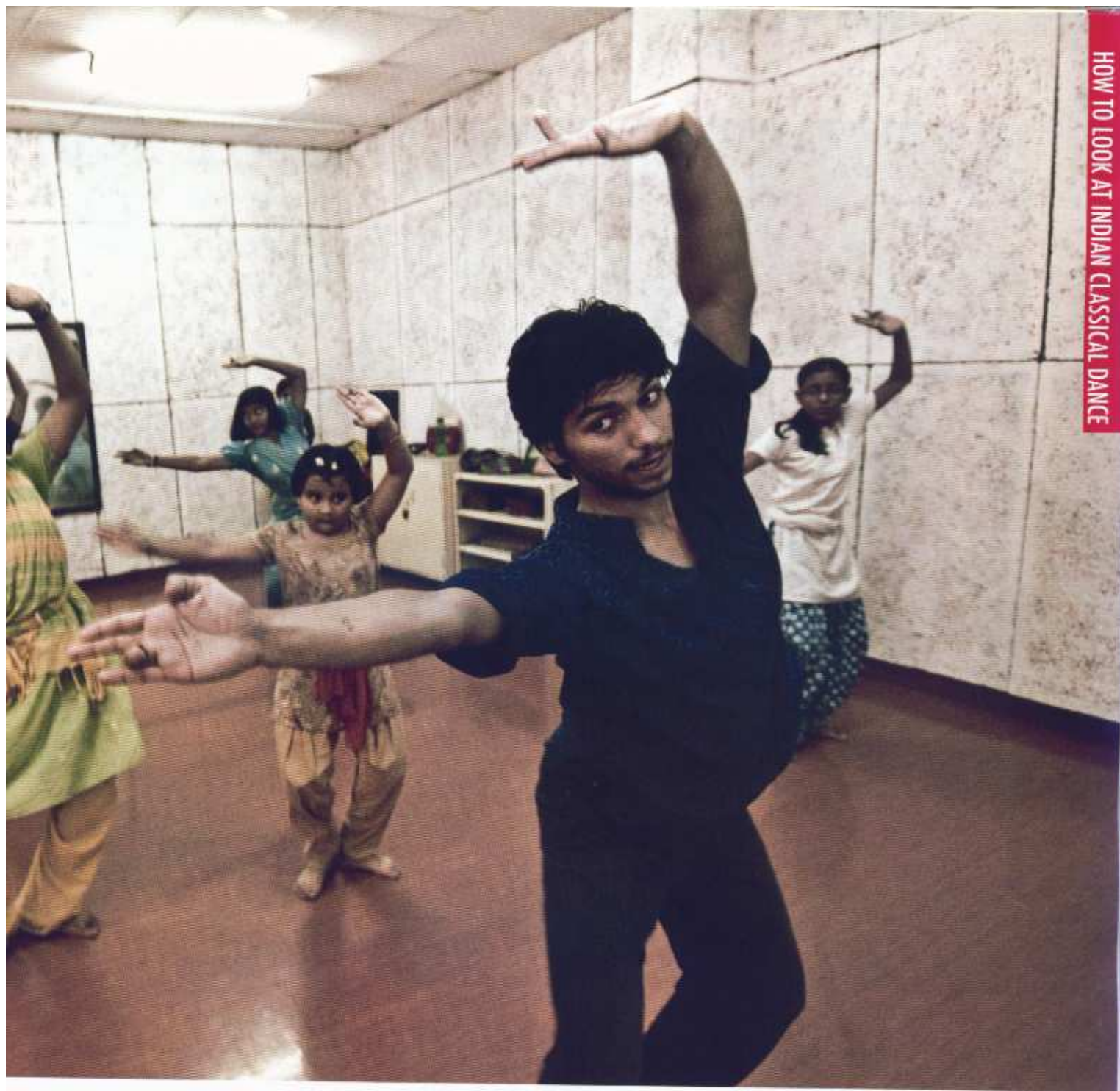
doing it herself, and teaching a course on International Business; Rachna has been an investment banker, consultant, leadership facilitator & coach, outdoor educator, and run a business among other things. The only thing that has been constant is change. Can be contacted at rachna.chawla@gmail.com

THE FIRST TIME I SAW A KATHAKALI PERFORMANCE, I COULDN'T UNDERSTAND ANYTHING GOING ON ONSTAGE, BUT HAD A DISTINCT SENSE THAT EVEN IF I DID NOT UNDERSTAND, THERE WAS SOMETHING MEANINGFUL GOING ON. THE VISCERAL TENSION KEPT ME AT THE EDGE OF MY SEAT WITH ANTICIPATION.



Invisible worlds brought to life

With its preoccupation with myth, extraordinary worlds and play-acting - Indian dance is tailor made to excite and engage the child's imagination, says Bharatnatyam exponent Navtej Johar.



Text: Navtej Johar | Photos: Dominik Huber

Before the curtains open, there is a kind of anticipation that used to be unbearably acute for me when I was a child. I was ready to be taken away, willing to be sucked into the magic of the stage. A child seeks magic in performance; he or she is more than willing to be transported to another world, to wholeheartedly believe in the world of make-believe. A friend's little boy asked his mother while watching a Bharatanatyam dance performance, "Mummy, woh kya bhagwan ji hain?" ("Mummy, is that god?") A child will go to great lengths to imagine and transpose the mysterious world of his understanding upon what goes on stage. A child is willing to put far more on stake than an adult would. Thus, the performer has a bigger responsibility when performing for



children. In fact, as I am writing this piece, I am making a resolve to make a classical work for children and tour it around schools.

Indian dance is myth-oriented. It seems tailor made to excite and engage the child's imagination because it a) deals with supernatural and the extraordinary realms that children are fascinated by and b) celebrates play-acting. The quicksilver fluidity with which a dancer glides through multiple identities - one

instant a man, then a seductress, then a god, a demon, a bird, a river, the breeze - can be exciting and bewitching for a child, apart from being immensely imagination-enhancing. For starters, children would understand and appreciate a classical performance better if they are already familiar with the myths being played out.

Having said that, let me add that there is actually far more in performance than the cognitive mind can register and understand.

Bharatanatyam is a classic dance form originating in Tamil Nadu. This dance form denotes various 19th and 20th century reconstructions of Cathir, the art of temple dancers. Cathir in turn, is derived from ancient dance forms. Bharatanatyam is usually accompanied by the classical Carnatic music.

In ancient times it was performed as *dasiattam* by temple Devadasis in various parts of South India. Many of the ancient sculptures in Hindu temples are based on dance *Karanas*. In fact, it is the celestial dancers, *apsaras*, who are depicted in many scriptures dancing the heavenly version of what is known on earth as Bharatanatyam.

In the most essential sense, a Hindu deity is a revered royal guest in his temple/abode, to be offered a standard set of religious services called *Sodasa Upacharas* ("sixteen hospitalities") among which are music and dance, as outlined in *Gandharva Veda*. Thus, many Hindu temples traditionally maintained complements of trained musicians and dancers, as did Indian rulers.

Bharatanatyam as a dance form and carnatic music set to it are deeply grounded in *Bhakti*. The word 'Bharat' is made up of three Sanskrit terms: *Bhaav* meaning emotion, *Raag* meaning music, and *Taal* meaning rhythm. The word *Natyam* means drama. The two words together describe this dance form.

Bharatanatyam, it is said, is the embodiment of music in visual form, a ceremony, and an act of devotion. Dance and music are inseparable forms; only with *Sangeetam* (words or syllables set to raga or melody) can dance be conceptualized.



Understanding all that is happening on stage definitely allows the viewer a major entry point into the performance - but there is a lot in there for the untutored viewer as well as for the viewer unfamiliar with the story. The most distinguishing feature of a live performance is its infectious, dramatic energy. The first time I saw a Kathakali performance, I couldn't understand anything going on onstage, but had a distinct sense that even if I did not understand, there was something meaningful going on. The visceral tension kept me at the edge of my seat with anticipation.

I often say that the dancer sees things while in performance which the audience cannot. The dancer is totally involved in this make-believe world and is responding to invisible characters. The conviction with which the dancer engages with these will determine the degree of involvement on part of the viewer. The viewer should want to see what the dancer is seeing and he (the viewer) cannot. It is the unfairness of the situation

A CHILD WILL GO TO GREAT LENGTHS TO IMAGINE AND TRANSPOSE THE MYSTERIOUS WORLD OF HIS UNDERSTANDING UPON WHAT GOES ON STAGE. A CHILD IS WILLING TO PUT FAR MORE ON STAKE THAN AN ADULT WOULD.

that propels the viewer to identify with the dancer. So, a lot depends upon the capability, skill and conviction of the dancer.

The Grammar of Performance

When watching a performance there are three distinct elements at play: one is the technique or the stylised vocabulary, the knowledge of which can help the viewer read the performance better; second is the variety of texts or myths that are enacted or elaborated; and finally it is the visceral energy of the performance.

1. The vocabulary is distinct and sometimes undecipherable. Though it takes a lot from real life - it may be borrowing from life in a different era or place - an element of foreignness predominates. The very idea of stylization is to make life look a little unfamiliar, un-ordinary, even extraordinary.

It is actually OK if a viewer does not understand everything in performance. To this date, I don't always fully understand what a dancer is doing on stage. But as long as there is something recognizable to latch on to, I, as the viewer, am able to put the puzzle together as it bears meaning for me.

2. The dance either directly enacts episodes from myths or culls out frozen moments from these stories to depict and voice the human condition. Knowing the myths or getting to understand the general context is imperative in appreciating the finer nuances of the performance. When deciphering



the textual layer within a performance it is important to remember that often these texts are essentially non-linear. They belong to the mythic imagination that counters rational conditioning and actually facilitates us - adults and children alike - to think out of the box. So what goes on stage cannot really be read or judged from a vantage point of rational thinking as traditional performances presuppose a shift in vantage point.

3. The responsibility of generating that all-important 'visceral connection' lies, first and foremost, with the dancer. A good performance, like an exciting game, is hard not to get involved with on the energy-plane but the audience too plays a very important role

in it. A jaded, cynical or stiff audience can effectively deflate or kill a performance. It is here that I would like to add that a child is less likely to be jaded or cynical (unless he or she has been already bored to death by dance through the tedium of dance classes at school or by an overbearing parent) as compared to an adult. Thus, in an ideal situation, all that a

WHAT AN ADULT NEEDS TO PRESERVE AND PROTECT IN A NOVICE VIEWER IS THE INNOCENCE AND SECURITY OF REMAINING HIS OR HER OWN PERSON.

child needs is the opportunity and the freedom to be his or her own person in order to make the best of a performance without any assistance or prodding.

Unselfconscious performer, Unselfconscious Audience

Whether the audience 'understands' a performance or not, the one thing that is fatal to the performance-experience is the element of self-consciousness. A self-conscious performer cannot slip and slide out of him/herself to inhabit different characters and create magic. A self-conscious audience will not be propelled out of their seats to engage with the performance.

I am personally acquainted with several people who feel very inadequate for not understanding the vocabulary of the dance. I urge them not to view dance from that slant - it makes the act of viewing tentative and self-conscious, and gets in the way of the visceral exchange so important to a live performance. The feeling of inadequacy is easily transmitted to young viewers. Another mistake is to making a cumbersome, heavy-duty monolith of the dance - representation of our illustrious past, emblem of high-culture, prerogative of the well bred. What an adult needs to preserve and protect in a novice viewer is the innocence and security of remaining his or her own person.

I often wonder if a child (or an adult, for that matter) would find it easier to enjoy a neighbourhood Ramlila more than a Bharatanatyam recital. A Ramlila is an event, an outing. It is fun - because it is unselfconscious - and it carries a similar message to, say, a classical dance performance. The difference in a classical dance



performance is that it is emotionally more distilled. It magnifies a dramatic moment, stretches it within a seemingly endless stretch of imagined time. In this imagined time, it may unravel multiple emotional and psychological complexities of that one dramatic moment. This process requires perspective – a resolved way of viewing, identifying and feeling from one-remove. And this perspective is well worth imbibing not just while learning to experience a dance performance, but in life and relationships as well. A classical dance performance can offer that experience – at least potentially.


Co-Authoring a Performance

Mindful watching from one-remove involves respect, or a respectful way of watching. This

means not jumping to conclusions. It means being sympathetic to the performer even though he or she may not be able to be magical or nuanced. It means exerting and extending yourself to read between the lines and actually feel the freedom to co-imagine or co-author the performance.

Co-authoring is can really enrich the performance-experience. And it can only come from a healthy dose of unselfconsciousness, respect and consideration. When watching a classical dance performance with your young loved one, exercise the basic rules of respect and restrain, refrain from intimidating messages that may make the child feel too inundated or self-conscious and allow as many forums to the child to imagine through engagement with a variety of arts.

It is important to remember that not all performers are great or magical. Mediocre performers far outnumber the gifted – and in such cases, it is perfectly fine if the viewers' co-authoring far exceeds the imagination of the dancer. The idea of watching a performance is that it can really ignite the wonderful faculty of imagination. ■



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DISABLED BUT ABLED!

Disability is defined by the United Nations as 'loss or abnormality of psychological or anatomical structure or function'. Thousands of people are glowing testimony to the fact that disability is not defined by loss of spirit, affirmative action or courage. It's time to wage a war against 'disable-phobia'.

Text and Photos: Kim Grace Haakip

Betsy has aspergers syndrome. Aspergers syndrome falls under the autism spectrum and is marked by stereotyped patterns of behavior and interests. Despite her limitations, I have often thought what has inspired her to be so vocal about her disability.

Betsy and her singing superhero alter ego, Danger Woman has been a regular feature of the Dragonkon- the largest multi-media, popular culture convention focusing on science fiction and fantasy, gaming, comics, literature, art, music, and film in the US.

She says that she is fighting against "disable-phobia" (her words). Don't you wonder why?



Born with fragile X syndrome, Tom is a 'disabled but abled' young man. He has a full time job at a grocery store where he bags groceries for the customers. He occasionally uses the public transportation to travel. He has a girlfriend and plans on marrying her someday. He has a cell phone on him and can call the emergency services when needed. He has a wonderful family and some terrific friends. Disabled but abled!

Darrell was a regular college going teenager who had a passion for cars and sneakers. He fell into

substance abuse and became an addict. Today he suffers from frequent memory loss and delusions. He still has not lost his passion for cars and fancy clothes. He dates a girl but realizes that he may not want to settle down for a family life.

Disability is defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities." An individual may also qualify as disabled if he/she has had an impairment in the past or

is seen as disabled based on a personal or group standard or norm. Such impairments may include physical, sensory, and cognitive or intellectual impairments. Mental disorders (also known as psychiatric or psychosocial disability) and various types of chronic disease may also be considered qualifying disabilities.

The United Nations uses a definition of disability that is different from the ADA:

Impairment: Any loss or abnormality of psychological, or

SOME FACTS!

According to the WHO, about six hundred million people live with disabilities of various types due to chronic diseases, injuries, violence, infectious diseases, malnutrition, and other causes closely related to poverty. This number is increasing. Of this total, 80% of people with disabilities live in low-income countries; most are poor and have limited or no access to basic services, including rehabilitation facilities.

The WHO is working towards promoting early intervention and identification of disability, especially for children; supporting the integration of community-based rehabilitation services into the health system; facilitating development and access to appropriate assistive devices, including wheel chairs, hearing aids, orthoses, prostheses, etc. which help to ensure the inclusion and participation of people with disabilities in their societies and strengthening collaborative work on disability across the United Nations system and with Member States, academia, private sector and nongovernmental organizations, including disabled people's organizations.

These days the awareness for disability rights is increasing and the disability rights movement is working towards a society where the physical and mental differences among people are accepted as normal. How we reacted to these differences is a social and perhaps a more moral choice.

anatomical structure or function.
Disability: Any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being.

Handicap: A disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or disability, that limits or prevents the fulfillment of a role that is normal, depending on

age, sex, social and cultural factors, for that individual.

Handicap is therefore a function of the relationship between disabled persons and their environment. It occurs when they encounter cultural, physical or social barriers which prevent their access to the various systems of society that are available to other citizens. Thus, handicap is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the life of the community on an equal level with others. (U.N. Decade of Disabled Persons 1983-1992. 1983. World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons. New York: United Nations)

According to this definition, to quite a degree, disability is a social creation.

People may know disability by definition but may not realize it in its entirety.

Balancing ability and disability has something amiss. There is a middle ground which can be often confused. What about the impairment which afflicts the people now and then- the need to corrective eyeglasses- from a lesser need for a wheelchair. Functionally, there may not be much different since both of them are aids if not used would render the person disabled. Socially, some impairments cause more awkwardness and disadvantage and even a social stigma for the person. Some of these impairments are considered by the society as disabilities and some are not.

The term "handicapped" is no longer appropriate. Today, "person with a disability" is more widely used. Further, words like "normal person" imply that the person with a disability isn't normal, whereas "person without a disability" is descriptive but not negative. This helps us by putting the person first as an individual rather than the

diagnosis. For a long period of time, persons with disabilities have been identified by their disability first, and as persons, second. Often, persons with disabilities are viewed as being afflicted with, or being victims of, a disability. In focusing on the disability, an individual's strengths, abilities, skills, and resources are often ignored. In many instances, persons with disabilities are viewed neither as having the capacity or right to express their goals and preferences nor as being resourceful and contributing members of society. Many words and phrases commonly used when discussing persons with disabilities reflect these biases.

In a 1998 internet conversation about labels as metaphors, Scott Danforth stated:

"In my experience, the scariest thing about these labels is the way we create them and then run around pretending they are not humanly created/ perpetuated. We treat them as if they are solid as a rock, unchanging, unquestionable. We also pretend that everyone using a given label or term means the same thing, an inevitability in language use."

The way I perceive it people with disabilities respond to you positively when they recognize that you are there to help and not ridicule.

A disability is only one aspect, and usually not the dominant one, of each individual. It must be emphasized that everyone wants to be treated as a person with unique feelings, thoughts, experiences, and abilities.

Address and treat individuals with disabilities with respect!

Communicate directly with the individual with mental retardation. Some individuals with mental retardation may have speech

SOME MORE FACTS!

Beethoven suffered from hearing impairment by the time he composed his 9th symphony.

Winston Churchill had a learning disability.

Walt Disney: had a learning disability.

Thomas Alva Edison had a learning disability. He couldn't read until he was twelve years old and had very difficult time writing even when he was older.

Albert Einstein had a learning disability and did not speak until age 3. He had a very difficult time doing math in school. It was very hard for him to express himself through writing.

Goya, the Spanish painter (1746-1828) at age 46, an illness left him hearing impaired. He went on to create the most famous Spanish art of the 19th century.

Alexander Graham Bell had a learning disability.

Stephen Hawking, the physicist/mathematician has Lou Gehrig's Disease and is in a wheelchair. He needs a computer to speak.

Milton, the English Author/poet (1608-1674) lost his vision at age 43. He went on to create his most famous epic, Paradise Lost.

General George Patton, the World War II General had a learning disability.

Nelson Rockefeller, former Vice President had dyslexia.

President Roosevelt, at age 39, was paralyzed by polio.

Other famous people who have learning disabilities include Cher, Tom Cruise, Whoopi Goldberg, Greg Louganis, Bruce Jenner, H.G. Wells.

Famous people who are known or are thought to have had epilepsy: Charles Dickens, Tchaikovsky, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Alfred Great, William Pitt, Napoleon, Byron, de Mopassant, Edward Lear, Handel, Berlioz, Paganini, Vincent Van Gogh.

Preferred Phrases	Phrases to avoid
Person with an intellectual, cognitive, developmental disability	Retarded; mentally retarded, stupid, having special needs
Individual who had a stroke	Stroke victim
Family supports needs	Family burden
Challenges which people with psychiatric disabilities face	Problem of mental illness or of the mentally ill
People who have schizophrenia	Schizophrenics
Individuals with epilepsy	Epileptics
Person with an amputation	Amputee
Individuals with paraplegia	Paraplegics
Visually impaired	The blind
Person with a disability	The disabled; handicapped
Hearing impaired or having a hearing impairment	Suffers a hearing loss
Person who has multiple sclerosis	Afflicted by MS
Person with cerebral palsy	CP victim or is CP
Person with autism	Autistic
Person with down syndrome	Downs or is down
Person who uses a wheelchair	Confined or restricted to a wheelchair
Person who has muscular dystrophy	Stricken by MD
Person with a physical disability, physically disabled	Crippled; lame; deformed
Person with psychiatric disability, person with mental illness	Crazy; nuts; mad
Person who is successful, productive	Has overcome his/her disability; is courageous (when it implies the person has courage because of having a disability)

impairments. If you have difficulty understanding their speech, polite ask them to repeat. Do not pretend to understand them and creating a false impression. Be patient. Take as much time as necessary. Try to ask questions which require only short answers or a nod of the head. Concentrate on what the individual is saying. Do not speak for the individual or attempt to finish her or his sentences. It will be easier to talk to the individual at eye level for easy conversation. Use first names.

My motivation in this venture is as Betsy aptly puts it, "It's an honor and a privilege"! ■

Turn to the next page (Page 38) for
Common Behaviors and Their Interventions



KIM GRACE NAOKIP is a case manager with people with disabilities in a non-for-profit agency. She has been working in this field for 10 years.

Prior to moving to USA, she was working as a speech and language therapist at WS, New Delhi. She is interested in travelling and watching movies is one of her passions. Currently, she is doing her PhD thesis from JNU, New Delhi, which she hopes to finish soon!!

COMMON BEHAVIORS AND THEIR INTERVENTIONS

Difficulty making realistic plans (wanting to get a driver's license for example)

Talking about setting long-range goals- break the goal into realistic goal e.g. "How about reading a driver's manual?"

Asking questions which will allow the individual to think and strategize, "What do you need to be able to do this?" Setting clear timelines.

Changing a topic or subject while talking. (For example, changing subject to going out for dinner when chores are being discussed.)

Repeat the importance of the topic being discussed. Politely say, "It is important to complete all your chores. I understand that you want to go out eat so how about completing your chores first?"

Difficulty following through on instructions.

Gain the individual's attention first.

Repeat the instructions as clearly using short sentences. If necessary, repeat information using different words. Check for understanding.

Difficulty sustaining effort and accuracy over time.

Try positive reinforcements. Praise him when he does it right!

Difficulty with any task that requires memory (e.g. Remembering the sequence of things at hand)

Include visual cues to trigger memory. Cue cards, visual aids like a scrapbook, diary can be used.

Confusion from non-verbal cues (misreads body language, etc.)

Explain directly what non-verbal cues mean.

Gestures or body movements do not universally communicate the same meaning or may be considered disrespectful. For example, in Germany, it is considered impolite to talk with your hands in your pockets

Difficulty sustaining attention to tasks or other activities (easily distracted by extraneous stimuli)

Praise any slight attention. Break up activities into small parts. Praise him for timely accomplishment.

Frequent carelessness.

Reinforce organizational skills. Help him write dates and appointments on a planner or calendar. Establish a daily routine. Praise him!

Inattention

(daydreaming, not there)

Give precise and clear direction on how to pay attention, look at me while I talk, watch my eyes while I speak). Ask him to repeat directions to make sure he understood!



Inappropriate seeking of attention (clowns around, exhibits loud excessive or exaggerated movement as attention-seeking behavior, interrupts)

Model how to gain other's attention appropriately. (Excuse me, may I have a word?)

Frequent excessive talking

Reinforce listening skills

Difficulty remaining seated or in a particular position when required to

Allow for frequent opportunities to get up and move around. Allow space for movement.

Frequent fidgeting with hands, feet or objects, squirming in seat.

Give frequent positive reinforcement for accomplishments (this type of behavior is often due to frustration). Allow alternative movement when possible.

Frequent involvement in physically dangerous activities without considering possible consequences

Redirect and explain the consequences!

Anticipate dangerous situations and plan for in advance. Also if the situation allows, let him experience the consequences (no desert if chores not done!)

Inappropriate behaviors in a team or large group sport or athletic activity (difficulty waiting turn in games or group situations)

This is usually because of agitation under pressure and competition. If you can give him a responsible job (e.g. team captain, care and distribution of the balls, score keeping, etc.); consider leadership role.

Stress effort and enjoyment for self, rather than competition with others.

Poor interactions. Defies authority.

Provide positive attention. One on one talk about the inappropriate behavior (what you are doing is..., a better way of getting what you need or want is...).

Frequent self-putdowns, poor personal care and posture, negative comments about self and others, low self-esteem

Provide positive reinforcements on improvements and self-monitoring. Teach self-questioning strategies (What am I doing? How is that going to affect others?) Give positive recognition.

Poor use of time (sitting, starting off into space, doodling, not working on task at hand)

Teach reminder cues (a gentle touch on the shoulder, hand signal, etc.).

Tell him of the expectations of what paying attention looks like. (You look like you are paying attention when...) Allow a time limit for a small unit of work with positive reinforcement for accurate completion.



HAVE A MINDFIELDS STORY TO SHARE?

- Do you know a person whose work in the realm of education merits celebration?
- Do you know a school that fosters individual thinking, that is unafraid of taking the less beaten path?
- Do you know a teacher whose work and spirit make for sparkling classroom interactions?
- Are you a creative individual – scientist, historian, artist, poet, musician, writer - who knows how to cut through the jargon and talk about your work to lay people?
- Do you have an anecdote about an insightful, heartwarming interaction with a student or child?

If the answer to any of these questions is 'yes' – do write to us at editor@mindfields.in

We would be happy to have your suggestions and contributions translate into interviews, features, comic strips in our future issues.

Contributors will receive a honorarium and a free yearlong subscription to Mindfields.



AWAITING FRIEND CONFIRMATION

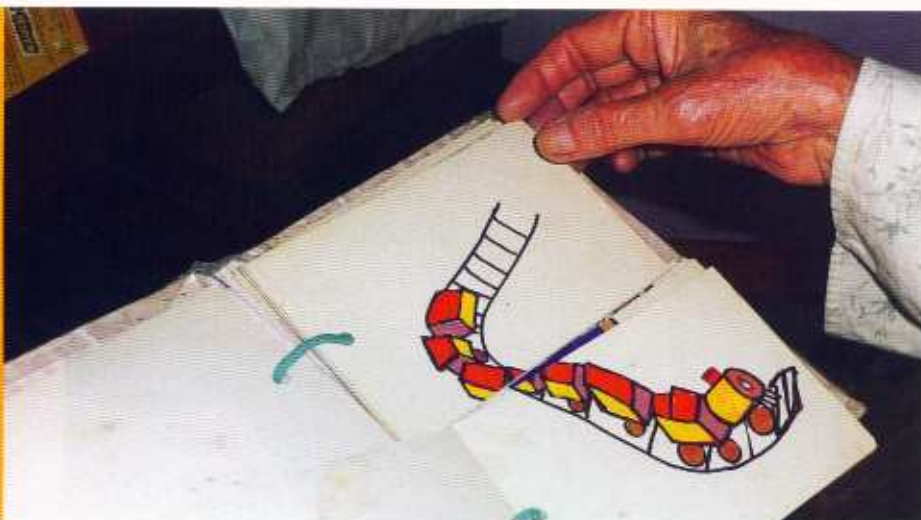
Qamar Azad Hashmi is an 83-year-old educationist, activist, author, mother, and survivor. As a young woman, she rejected her family name to take on the name 'Azad' – free. Her life has mirrored the tragedies, fractures, and separations of the subcontinent – but she has always lived on her own terms.

Text and Photos: Shagufta Bhardwaj

Today her apartment in Delhi is scattered with the writings and photographs of people she has outlived, including one of her two sons, the pioneering playwright Safdar Hashmi. In spite of all that she has endured, Qamar Azad remains deeply driven by her vision of a creative, dynamic system of education for India's children.

Within a few moments of my first meeting with her, Qamar Azad revealed the strength and determination that has sustained her delicate frame all these years. Despite a constant struggle with age-related health problems, she moves effortlessly around her apartment, talking with visitors and undertaking her daily

QAMAR WAS DETERMINED TO LET NOTHING COME IN THE WAY OF HER LEARNING. BY THAT TIME SHE HAD THREE YOUNG CHILDREN AT HOME AND ANOTHER WAS BORN JUST FOUR DAYS AFTER HER FINAL MONTESSORI EXAM. BUT NOTHING COULD DETER HER.



chores. When she finally sat down at an elegant study table designed by her husband—"the table's older than you", she exclaimed—I began to appreciate what it is that drives and inspires her.

Surrounding her study table are black and white photographs of her father (who looks strikingly like Lokmanya Tilak), biological and 'rakhi' brothers, and extended members of the family. Among the images is a framed photograph of Pandit Nehru taken on the momentous occasion of India's birth as a nation. Qamar Azad Hashmi is one of the few remaining from a generation that believed deeply in that 'tryst with destiny' Nehru professed.

She read the last lines of his speech that night for me: "It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity." She paused and then added, "I do not understand you girls talking about liberation and modernity today. On 14th August 1947, I left my house with my brother's friend to hear Panditji's speech at midnight. There was a sea of humans who had flooded the roads of Delhi. I was one of them and even though I could not see the stage or get any

where near it, I was proud to have heard Panditji. I was 19 then."

Born in 1926 in Jhansi to Azhar Ali 'Azad', Qamar Azad was educated in Aligarh, Lucknow, Malihabad and Kasmandi. Her father was a tehsildar who had to move his family around constantly. Apart from his administrative position, Azhar Ali Azad was a poet who wrote in Persian and Urdu. He contributed verses to literary magazines. He also published a literary journal that was edited by Qamar's mother. Qamar describes her family as 'not wealthy' but intellectual and creative. Learning in her family was based on recitations of verses and stories that she and her siblings mimed while resting under mango trees outside their home. Young Qamar rejected the family surname Abbasi and chose to call herself 'Azad' or 'free' (from her father's pen name).

She had early brushes in her childhood with serving as a teacher. "I was not as bright as my elder sister or as beautiful as my younger sister," she told me. "But I had a gift—I could monitor well." Her teacher, who was also the head mistress and the administrator of the small school of 40 girls in Malihabad, asked her to teach the girls while she was busy finishing

her other odd responsibilities.

Family fortunes kept changing over time and the family moved to Delhi to stay with Qamar's elder brother, who was a lecturer in English at the Kashmiri Gate Polytechnic. Despite the communal tension rising before independence and partition, young Qamar simply dreamed of finishing her education. But tremendous upheavals stood in her way. Her brother surprised everyone at home by opting to migrate to Pakistan. Because her parents and younger siblings were dependent on him, they reluctantly agreed. The family faced numerous threats to their lives before reaching Pakistan. But to Qamar the biggest loss was leaving her books and notes behind.

Adapting to life in Pakistan was a challenge. Qamar and her parents could not find the space for a progressive, educated Muslim family in the bitter social and political environment after independence. Qamar took it upon herself to add to the family's diminishing income and growing expenditures. She wrote for a newspaper called Imroze and made handkerchiefs for a shopkeeper in the Anarkali Bazaar of Lahore. The need to earn something extra inspired her to create a new line of handkerchiefs for the shopkeeper. He was so impressed by her



creativity and conversational skills that he requested her to teach his daughter. Qamar took up the assignment and within a month her student's grades improved, much to the shopkeeper's delight. So he entrusted his son's tuitions to Qamar as well.

Qamar's life would take a new turn through the influence of the politically active Hashmi family, friends of her parents since their days in Delhi. The Hashmis encouraged Qamar to attend meetings of the Progressive Writers Association. She met young poets of the Indo-Pak literary movement, listened to their poetry, and studied trends. Her literary horizons expanded.

But the Hashmi family's influence would extend beyond literature. The Hashmis proposed that Qamar marry their son Haneef, who had opted to remain back in Delhi. Haneef Hashmi was an avant-garde craftsman whose workshop made furniture for embassies in Delhi. Qamar and her family accepted, though it meant saying painful

goodbyes. She would not see her family again for decades.

Qamar set up a home with her husband in Delhi. Upon a family friend's request there, she filled out the forms for International Montessori training at Delhi College

"I AM AMAZED HOW STUDENTS OF THE SO-CALLED GOOD SCHOOLS LACK BASIC APPLICATION. WE HAD NO RESOURCES... WE WERE POOR BUT WE HAD A FIRE IN US."

and informed her husband only after getting admission to the school. The family was going through one financial misfortune after the other, but Qamar was still determined to let nothing come in the way of her learning. By that time she had three young children at home and another was born just four days after her final Montessori exam. But nothing could deter her.

Dr. Zakir Hussain, then the Vice-Chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University and a family friend, encouraged Haneef Hashmi to move to Aligarh. During her years in Aligarh, Qamar was itching to be useful and do more than create fancy dress costumes for her children's school functions. She enrolled in a graduate degree course at the Aligarh Muslim University. Her husband took over the household responsibilities for three months during her exams. The young Qamar's dream of being a graduate, a dream disrupted by partition, marriage, and children, was finally fulfilled.

Qamar took a vacation with relatives in Delhi that turned out to be a blessing in disguise. She interviewed for the position of a nursery teacher advertised by the Delhi Municipal Corporation and was not only accepted, but swiftly upgraded to the position of head mistress. She was at the threshold of a new journey.

Qamar lived alone in Delhi for over three years, meeting her family in Aligarh only every ten days. Her "independent lifestyle" became a matter of debate within the family but Qamar remained determined. Her position's administrative duties coupled with burgeoning family pressures only increased her determination to keep going.

When Qamar speaks of her career as a head mistress her voice fills with enthusiasm. She took me to her study where she has cartons full of material she has been busy creating for over 40 years. One almirah holds three decades of experiences in education. As I unraveled the contents—matchboxes, beads, seeds, elastics, corrugated sheets, cardboard shapes and jars of various shapes and sizes—I heard her say, "Sometimes

people find it embarrassing that I scan the dust-bin before I send it out. I never let anything interesting, any shape, pass out of the house. They all enter this box to be a part of my nursery kit."

The genesis of her collecting is Maria Montessori's resource kit that she and her teachers struggled to implement at the NDMC Nursery School. In order to create new experiences for children, so they would have a better understanding of the world around them, she and her team of teachers stretched their imaginations to prepare more effective and economical means of preparing the Montessori kit. They adapted and expanded the kit and Qamar was proud of her teacher's creativity. Three of them won prestigious awards from the NDMC.

Qamar's reputation as a determined, no-nonsense, and dependable Head Mistress grew with each school she was transferred to. She fought with the authorities, teachers and parents to get new learning materials, improved resource kits, stronger roofs, and better teachers. She wanted her students to have membership to Bal Bhawan and pushed to take them on weekly trips to Lodi Gardens. She also advocated for teaching materials that incorporated visuals and the dynamic contents of her brimming cartons, perceived then as "unconventional." Her attitude was always, "Of course we can do this!" She encouraged her teachers to "unlearn" the books and follow their instincts.

Three decades of distinguished service in education did not mean her life was without grief or tragedy. She witnessed her husband weaken with an illness and then pass away. Later, in 1989, her son Safdar was brutally murdered for his strident and creative opposition to government oppression. But

"SOMETIMES PEOPLE FIND IT EMBARRASSING THAT I SCAN THE DUST-BIN BEFORE I SEND IT OUT. I NEVER LET ANYTHING INTERESTING, ANY SHAPE, PASS OUT OF THE HOUSE. THEY ALL ENTER THIS BOX TO BE A PART OF MY NURSERY KIT."

tragedy has never derailed her life's struggle to improve children's education.

"Struggles keep going on and life without struggles is not a life enough. But I disagree with the idea of learning by heart. What total non-sense," she told me. "Teachers find the learn-by-heart pattern easy as it is unchallenging. But observation and using sensory organs is the most effective way of learning. One of the mandatory subjects at my school was to sow seeds and see the various stages of growth. We would relate this to the child's personal growth. I am amazed how students of the so-called good schools lack basic application. We had no resources... we were poor but we had a fire in us."

Whether she was working with her daughter to run informal schools for Muslim girls in Nizamuddin basti or speaking at public functions, Qamar's life during her school years was always 9-9. 'I just cannot stop imagining,' she exclaimed.

In 1988 Qamar was honoured with the State Award for Best Teacher. After her retirement in 1990, she completed her Masters in Urdu and published an anthology of her father's poetry. She also wrote a

book *The Fifth Flame* about her deceased son's life. Now she is busy working on a book based on her thirty years of experience as a nursery school Head Mistress.

As she read out some passages from her manuscript to me, I remembered the "tryst with destiny." Each carefully handwritten page recorded her own tryst with educating the children of a free India. Some lines go like: "It is wrong to correct a child. We need to be prepared for a child's boundless imagination which is not caged like ours. Their strength of mind is different than ours and they can surprise us." She stopped and reminisced: "Oh, how tough it is to have your teachers think out of the box! Just to use simple words, simple tools..."

Another passage of the manuscript notes: "For thousands of years humans have been following their own intellectual and mental freedom to follow pursuits like painting, writing and even today the artist is master of his thoughts. A child can express through colours or clay with his limited verbal vocabulary. We need to observe closer. I always told my teachers to leave them alone while they are painting."

As we spoke in her study, Qamar began re-arranging her cartons. "I love to keep myself busy. These boxes are a result of fifty years of 'being busy.'" ■



SHAGUFTA BHARDWAJ is a cultural historian, advisor and educator. Leads Sunday walks to heritage sites for the India Habitat Centre. Can generally be found in the narrowest lanes leading to the oldest havelis in Delhi.

RECOMMENDED READING

Text: Anavinda A.



SAVING GRANDMA'S TREE

by Jey Manokaran, Illustrations by Partha Sengupta
Scholastic India

I live in Bangalore and if there are those among you who live here, you'll know how the city's changing. Well, change is good but it sure as anything hurts when you are going down a tree-lined avenue only to see woodcutters at work. And every time I watch this happen, I am reminded of the women in Garhwal in the Himalayas who took it on themselves to save their trees, back in the 70s. Now famous as the 'Chipko' movement, it has been such an inspiration for many, and I was pleasantly surprised to see a book for children that talks about this fantastic story.

Jey Manokaran's story draws greatly from the original and the book is interspersed with fact boxes ranging from a description of what the Bhotiya tribal's of Garhwal wear to the Alakananda flood to the effect of deforestation that is so simply described that kids should have no trouble understanding the gravity of the situation and putting two and two together. In her story, Chandri the protagonist is a young girl who is especially attached to the ash tree where she believes her grandma's spirit lives. One day, when the men of the village are away, she spies the tree-fellers marking trees to cut. And Grandma's tree among them! She rushes to the village and alerts the women and they all come out to save their trees

by hugging them. Chandri selects her beloved ash tree to hug and that's how the trees are saved for the day!

Manokaran is a prolific author and illustrator and this is an admirable attempt to talk about something as important as the Chipko movement, for children. Published in 2006 by Scholastic, this edition also carries a foreword by renowned activist Medha Patkar.

And now, two circus books, and it's only a coincidence!



HIGH WIRE (EDGAR AND ELLEN)

by Charles Ogden
Simon and Schuster

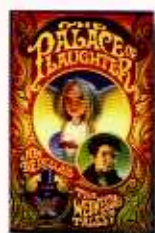
This one comes in a nice hardback edition that makes it a pleasure to pick up. The praise for the book on the back cover includes one by a 12-year old who says, "Edgar and Ellen are so bad...I love them." 'Nuff said, I say to myself. Before I forget, there's an entire series of these books with names like Rare Beasts, Tourist Trap, Under Town, Nod's Limbs and Pet's Revenge. I am still not sure if you need to read them in order, for I certainly didn't miss anything as I read High Wire.

Edgar and Ellen are 12-year old twins who live in a grim tower on the edge of a town by name Nod's End. They are pranksters who seem to enjoy looking for something to fix and inevitably get into trouble.



Their housekeeper is the strange Heimertz who wears an eerie smile and never speaks, and Pet, their hairy one-eyed creature. Throw into this the Mayor's daughter, Stephanie who is arch enemy number 1 and you have met most of the characters already.

What I absolutely enjoyed about this book was that it makes no attempts to hold back! Edgar and Ellen and their talents as escape artist and botanist take you where the fun is! In this book, the Heimertz Family Seven-Ring Circus Show and Carnival visits Nod's Limbs just as E & E are running away from Heimertz who seems to be mentally unhinged, and Pet who's beginning to appear to be the murder suspect of a previously unsolved mystery. And to top it all, E & E want to join the circus too. But not before they have some pranks to play and tests to do and then again, do they really want to leave their tower and their Pet! Another mad story that kids will love!



THE PALACE OF LAUGHTER

by Jon Berkeley
Simon & Schuster

With a title as intriguing as *The Palace of Laughter*, one cannot walk past it without stopping to sate the curiosity. Then you find the back cover says 'Laughter can be dangerous' and so you have to check it out from the library and come home to read it, stopping on the way to pick up something to snack on.

The first book in the Wednesday

Tales series, it is an engrossing and absolutely satisfying read. Berkeley creates another world that draws you in rather nicely. Miles Wednesday, orphaned, with a house in a barrel and two friends in the world – Tangerine the teddy bear that lives in his pocket and Lady Partridge who lives on a tree is the only one awake as the Circus Oscuro comes to the village of Larde in the dead of night. There is something almost sinister about the circus and Miles wants to get closer and have a sneak peek.

Miles Wednesday, curious and wondering if he dreamt a tiger telling him, "I smell the circus in you" gets close to the circus alright, and watches the show from the bleachers. When he sees a little girl with the most delicate of wings trussed up after her show, he just has to rescue her from the clutches of the evil ringmaster The Great Cortado and his assistant, Genghis and so he does.

Miles Wednesday, brave and with his new friend Little take refuge with Lady Partridge before they set forth on their adventure – to save Silverpoint, who like Little, has come from the Realm and is now bound to the Circus Oscuro.

A little later, Miles Wednesday, Tangerine-less and with Little for company ride on the tiger's back to where the Circus has traveled to since Larde, stopping to have more adventures.

The descriptions are so complete and although filled with such fantastic things such as a talking tiger and people from the other world, it holds up rather well as a

good piece of work. Which is refreshing since that genre is a tad overdone. Berkeley is skilled enough to take you close to the characters which is commendable and has won the book its own fan following. The second and third of *The Wednesday Tales* are also available, titled *The Tiger's Egg* and *The Lightning Key* respectively.

PS:

I just had to add a note on Uncle John's *Electrifying Bathroom Reader for Kids* only – it's a must-read for anyone who loves trivia. The Bathroom Readers Institute is to thank for this madcap series of books for both the young and old. And if you have reluctant readers around you, this is a good book to share with them. I did with one of our members at Hippocampus (who read it cover to cover and came back for more), and was rewarded with home made banana cake by her mother. ■



ARAVINDA A.

Joined Hippocampus to be around books. Likes writing and tries to earn a living from it. Loves the company of dogs. Agrees

completely with the anon Zen master who said, "I never got lost because I don't know where I'm going."

NEWSBYTES

RAY OF HOPE FOR DISABLED CHILDREN LUDHIANA

1,000 physically challenged students suffering from orthopaedic problems will be able to stand on their own feet, thanks to a programme started by the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).

The children will undergo surgery under SSA's programme 'Inclusive Education For The Disabled'. In collaboration with three hospitals in the city, the department is providing a free of cost treatment for these students. The facility would be a boon for the students, who find it difficult to bear the expenses of surgery.

Under the programme, a resource person in every block of the district checks the health of students and sends a report to the department. After this, doctors at health awareness camps assess whether a student needs artificial limbs or surgery. Last year, 1,839 students were examined in the district by a team of four doctors, experts in different fields.

REMEDIAL TEACHING BANGALORE

TComissioner of Public Instruction Kumar G Naik who announced the SSLC results on Friday, explained that one of the reasons for pass percentage improvement could be

introduction of remedial teaching in schools, where special classes are held for students outside school hours who need extra coaching. Subject-wise, mathematics continues to challenge Karnataka's students. "This year, the overall pass percentage in maths is better with 82.21. Last year, maths, at 72.77%, happened to be one of the reasons for the dip in the results," Naik said. Third language got the highest pass percentage with 93.90.

Difficult to digest is the fact that 174 students have got zero in first language while 296 students scored 100%. Students who have secured 0% would have either given the wrong answer or left the answer sheet blank. Similarly, 35 schools have recorded zero percentage of which one is a government school, two aided and remaining unaided. "We will write to these schools asking them to give reasons for poor performance. Based on the reply, appropriate measures will be taken," said director of secondary education Chidreshankaraiah Swamy.

WALL-LESS SCHOOL MOCKS TALL VOWS GUWAHATI

This Kalapani is not the cellular jail in the midst of a swirling bay. But the images from Guwahati's Kalapani are as stark as its infamous namesake. Standing in the middle of Kalapani char is a

bare structure without any walls and a leaking roof – No. 1 South Kalapani Primary School.

Elections have come and gone, governments have changed – both at the state and Centre – but the school's condition has remained the same. No desks or benches. The school does not even have a headmaster for the past 12 years. No teacher either for over a decade. The school is a case study of successive governments' apathy towards the most fundamental of the voters' rights – primary education.

Set up in 1980, the school caters to nearly 15 villages in and around the area but has seen nothing that goes by the name of government aid. It now has 70 students but no teachers. Educated youths of the villages take turns to teach, and that, too, when they have the time. Md Shurat Zaman, a resident of Kalapani char and a social worker, said: "Ever since the previous headmaster retired in 1997, the school is headless. The government, too, has not appointed any teachers".

"Some of the youths of the village voluntarily took up teaching at the school," he said and added that this is one of the worst examples how the much-hyped Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Mission works. "The classes in the school depend entirely on weather conditions. It is possible to take classes

only on sunny days, as there is no wall and a leaking tin roof. We cannot take classes on rainy days, not to talk of floods," said Md Taj Uddin Ahmed, one of the honorary teachers at the school. "Not only this school – the whole Kalapani char wears the same dilapidated condition. This char and several other chars in the vicinity – Pagladiya char, Bengenati char and Sialmari char – are visible to the political leaders only during elections," said Ahmed.

"Can we call it a school? There are no desks, no benches and no table.... nothing. There are no walls either and the decades-old tin roof cannot save you from the rain," said Azizur Rahman, a resident near the school, adding school-time is just "time-pass for the young boys of the village".

EXAMINATIONS, THE DIGITAL WAY COIMBATORE

In their path-breaking journey from conventional teaching to e-learning, some universities have travelled the extra mile to introduce online examination. In fact, this happened a year ago. The students of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU), Coimbatore, took their mid-semester examinations online as early as April 2008. From delivery of question paper to evaluation, everything was done online. The scores were sent to the students through email.

The next step in this direction will be digital marksheets. However, the university's faculty which has devised the whole system feels that it has to strengthen the examination system before venturing into digital marksheets. According to V. Valluvaparidasan, Controller of Examinations, TNAU, the university will have to make a policy decision on introducing digital marksheets. A similar achievement was made by Anna University, Coimbatore, recently when it adopted an integrated Examination Management System (EMS).

In this system, a whole range of processes – registration of candidates, publication of results, printing of marksheets and certificates, and so on – are done online. It is also expected to encompass other examination processes such as hall ticket generation, secure delivery of question papers, multiple digital evaluation, tracking of students' performance and performance analysis. The system, provided by Mindlogicx Infotech Limited, is implemented in such a way that the university serves as a Networking Centre with affiliated colleges as the Examination Data Centres.

The system was introduced in a gradual way. The university has not yet ventured into online examinations. The overall system will be based on SGPA (Semester Grade Point Average) and CGPA

(Cumulative Grade Point Average) rather than marks. The 9-point scheme of the international system of grading will be followed. Chennai-based Odyssey Technologies has developed Altasigna, a software that can generate large-scale digital documents. Commenting on implementation of digital exams and marksheets in universities, Robert Raja, director of the company says, "Despite the benefits involved, a digital document falls short of its physical equivalent with respect to confidentiality, authentication, integrity and non-repudiation. Therefore, a digital document has to be digitally signed and frozen in such a way that tampering is impossible."

Stephan Balzter, representative of German Academic Exchange Service, Chennai, says "Issuing of digital marksheets can speed up the admission procedure to some extent. The time wasted on cross-verification with the Indian university with regard to the student's marks secured can be saved."

"Digital marksheet system can cut down cost and it will be convenient as well as it can be stored even in a mobile phone. Also, students need not waste time for getting the marksheets attested," says Mr. Raja.

"Digital marksheets as a genuine proof of marks in future can eliminate faking scores and degrees. Apart from

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being hassle-free, it simplifies the application procedure for applying for internships, research programmes and higher education overseas. Marksheet verification procedure can also be eliminated," says N. Namrita, III year engineering student of S.A. Engineering College, Chennai. "But the responsibility of the company creating this technology will be huge. Because, once hacked, the consequences can be dire. The software must make sure other websites do not replicate the results published," she says.

According to vice-chancellor of Anna University, Coimbatore, R. Radhakrishnan, the digital shift will aid in managing examinations virtually in a transparent, efficient and foolproof manner. "We will try to get the first set of digital marksheets ready by July. It will come with international security barcode and authentication. Hence, there will be no question as to its genuineness. Also, it cannot be downloaded or photocopied."

COUNSELLING TO CUT DROPOUT RATE IN CIVIC SCHOOLS PUNE

The Pune Municipal Corporation School Board has decided to appoint a counsellor for each of its 271 schools to prevent students from dropping out. A lot of students have been quitting studies

midway. At least 6,000 children quit studies in 301 private, aided and unaided government schools last year. Of these, 386 dropped out due to socio-cultural reasons.

Moreover, a recent study by the Maharashtra Institute of Mental Health (MIMH), which was part of the school mental health project to assess schoolchildren for psychological morbidity, found that at least 25 children from a total of 1,100 had quit school, either due to conflicts in the family or because of an alcoholic father.

"To check dropouts, the school board last month appointed counsellors to sensitise parents and teachers on child behaviour patterns," says Bhushan Nalge, coordinator, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. The school mental health project also has counsellors at three municipal schools on a pilot basis. Says Dr Alka Pawar, director, MIMH, "Our study selected 1,100 students from three municipal schools around Sassoon Road. At least 25 children had quit due to family related problems, and six due to psychiatric illness like adjustment disorders. Eleven children were mentally challenged. However, there was no severe mental retardation."

The District Planning and Development Committee had sanctioned Rs 5 lakh for the study. Pawar said they specifically selected

corporation schools, as most children from the lower socio-economic strata do not complete their entire schooling.

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MUSTWATCH

Sridala Swami recommends four adventure films (ranging from 1939-1968) that have withstood the test of time and are a delight to watch even today.



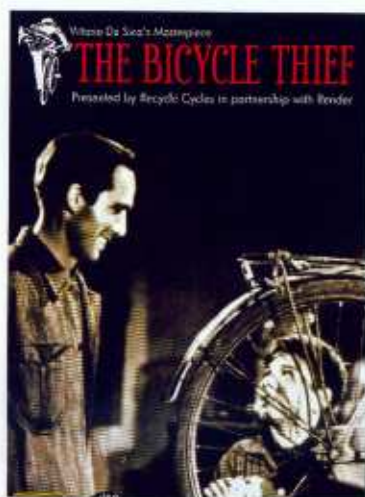
THE WIZARD OF OZ (1939, USA)

Director: Victor Fleming

Cast: Judy Garland, Frank Morgan, Ray Bolger, Bert Lahr, Jack Haley

Runtime: 101 min

In this charming film based on the popular L. Frank Baum stories, Dorothy and her dog Toto are caught in a tornado's path and somehow end up in the land of Oz. Here she meets some memorable friends and foes in her journey to meet the Wizard of Oz who everyone says can help her return home and possibly grant her new friends their goals of a brain, heart and courage.



BICYCLE THIEVES (1948, ITALY)

Director: Vittorio De Sica

Cast: Lamberto Maggiorani, Enzo Staiola, Lianella Carell, Gino Saltamerenda

Runtime: 93 mins

Antonio Ricci, unemployed for over two years, is overjoyed when he's finally given a job putting up posters. There's a catch, though - he needs a bicycle as a requirement of the job, so he pawns the family linen to get a pawned bicycle back. He goes off to his first day's work, truly happy for the first time in years, until...



THOSE MAGNIFICENT MEN AND THEIR FLYING MACHINES (1965, USA)

Director: Ken Annakin

Cast: Stuart Whitman, Sarah Miles, James Fox, Alberto Sordi

Runtime: 138 min

This movie is about the exploits of multiple airplane pilots from around the world as they race from London, England to Paris, France in the year 1910 and vie for the top prize of £10,000. This occurs however, with multiple goofs and pranks played by the competitors on each other, producing one of the funniest races of its time.

CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG (1968, UK)

Director: Ken Hughes

Cast: Dick Van Dyke, Sally Ann Howes, Lionel Jeffries, Gert Fröbe

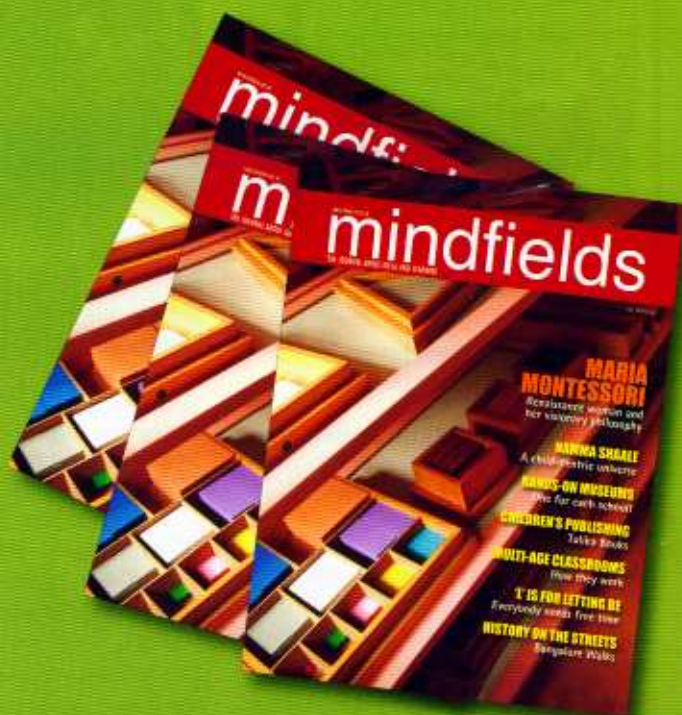
Runtime: 144 min

An eccentric professor invents wacky machinery, but can't seem to make ends meet. When he invents a revolutionary car, a foreign government becomes interested in it, and resorts to skullduggery to get their hands on it.

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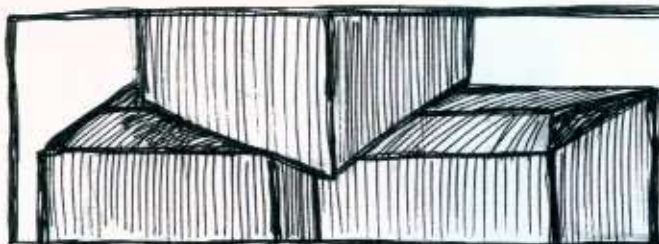
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Notes from the Trenches

TEXT AND ILLUSTRATIONS: AMRUTA PATIL



On the playground, an empty TV carton has become the star of the day.



It is the duty of kittens and children to crawl into every empty carton - and this is duly done.



TV carton temporarily upstages both, Bakugan Battle Launcher and electric green scooter.



It jiggles with mirth and runs about on sneakered feet. It turns into new cities and planets.



House. Submarine. Palace. Bunker. Tortoise shell. Fortress. Car boot.



A TV carton, as all children know, is 100% potential.



AN INCLUSIVE, HANDS-ON SCHOOL

Few schools in Mumbai can match the Udayachal School in terms of space and vision. Located in Vikhroli, the school is run by the Godrej group for its employee's children. It began in 1955, led by the late Mrs. Cooverbai Vakil - a petite lady, affectionately called "Aunty" by one and all. Mrs. Vakil had worked in Shantiniketan, where she imbibed a fine sense of aesthetics and a love for simple living and high thinking. She brought this artistic sensitivity to the school. In the early years of Udayachal school, Mrs. Vakil had to persuade parents to send their children to school. And when the children did come, they had to be washed, cleaned, and fed. Under Mrs. Vakil's loving guidance, the teachers did all this willingly.

The most admirable thing about the school is its inclusiveness, its disregard of social stature. Children of managers, shop workers and gardeners - all study together. As part of their corporate social responsibility, Godrej provides free education to two children of every employee. Why only two? This is in keeping with their philosophy of providing good education and simultaneously exercising some control over our burgeoning population. Unlike many fancy schools, there are no admission tests - since education is considered a fundamental right of every child. The only criterion is that the child be over the age of three. When the school began, most children in it were first

generation learners. They spoke Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati, Tamil, Telegu, Kannada and Malayalam at home - only ten percent spoke English. The school is still a representation of a mini-India. Children learn to respect differences of culture and faith. Morning prayers have a secular character - they are usually in praise of nature thanking mother earth for her bounties and beauties.

Twenty years ago, I had the privilege of spending a day in Udayachal school. The school was then headed by the eminent educator, Shirin Choksey. She took me to a class where children were practicing music. I was used to situations where one or two children sing and the others mutely listen. So it was a surprise to see every child playing music with ingeniously improvised 'instruments'. The instruments consisted of empty powder tins filled with pebbles to make sound; cymbals made of shoe polish bottle lids; a cylindrical tin with a wooden baton nailed to it and a wire strung taut became an Ektara. Children enjoyed these contraptions enormously and the whole class participated in the orchestra.

The pre-school section was no less a delight. It was the norm for children to bring in old newspapers from home. These were soaked overnight in a water tank, and the next morning, the little ones hammered them into shreds and bits dissipating all

their pent-up energy. When I walked in, a class full of four-year-olds sat on their haunches and hammered away at soaked newspapers with wooden mallets. So absorbed were they in this 'destructive' act, no one even looked up at me. Later the newspaper pulp was mixed with clay and glue to make pliable dough. Using this homemade dough, children crafted toys, figurines, pots and pans and painted their papier-mâché creations. This reminded me of John Holt's description of an experimental school in Denmark. The children of this free school loved hammering nails into wood. What they loved most was to imprint their names on wooden planks by hammering in nails!

There is a tremendous emphasis on activities in the elementary school. Children play with natural, everyday things to create pieces of art. The classroom has a demarcated place where such treasures such as leaves, twigs, different varieties of seeds, twine, coconut shells and brown corrugated cartons are stored - raw material for future projects. Learning by doing is a motto the school lives by. Whatever the children do with their hands they later document. Children love writing their own experiences. This makes the language come alive! ■

Arvind Gupta is a scientist, educator and toymaker. Read more about his work at www.arvindguptatoys.com



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